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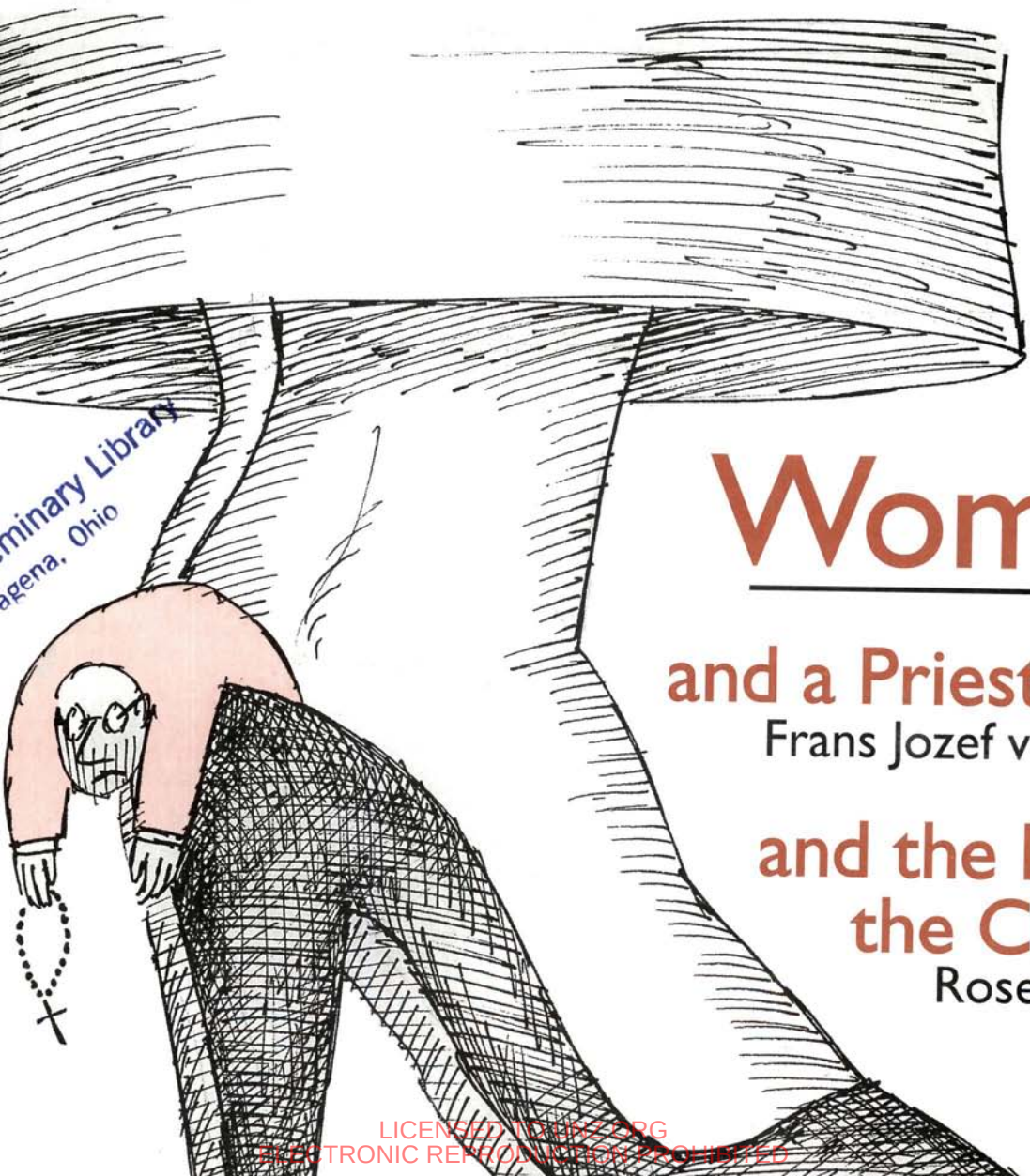
Issue

January 2

COMMONWEA



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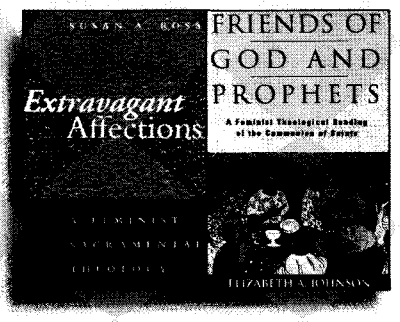


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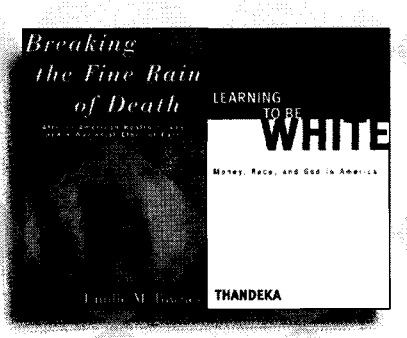


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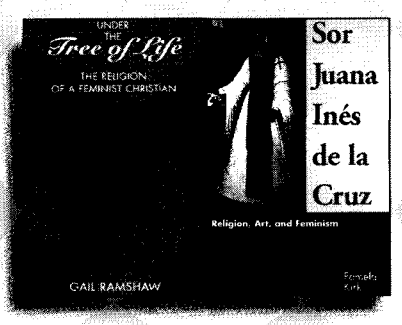


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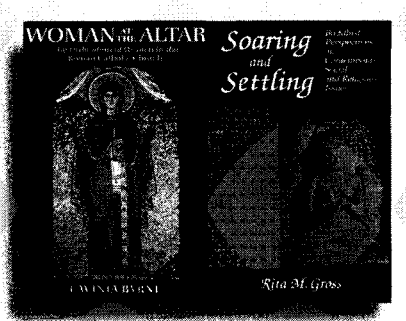

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# COMMONWEAL

January 29, 1999 / Volume CXXVI, Number 2

## UPFRONT

**Correspondence** *Indulgences, confession...* 4

**Editorial** *The rule of law* 5

**Notebook** *Seventy-five fat years*
Margaret O'Brien Steinfels 6

**From the archives** *November 12, 1924* 7

### COLUMNISTS

**Who's driving?**
William Pfaff 7

**Better schools**
Abigail McCarthy 8

### SHORT TAKES

**'Double effect'**
Kevin P. Glynn 10

## ARTICLES

### THEOLOGY ISSUE

**THE WOMEN IN MY LIFE**
Frans Jozef van Beeck
*What might the tradition of celibate male priesthood tell us about the nature of men, women, and the sacraments?* 12

**YVES CONGAR ON PATIENCE**
Yves Congar
translated by Christopher Ruddy 14

**CONSIDER TRADITION**
Rose Hoover
*The time is past to ordain women.* 17

## VERDICTS

### SCREEN

**PSYCHO • YOU'VE GOT MAIL • PRINCE OF EGYPT**
Richard Alleva 21

### STAGE

**ATTITUDE**
Celia Wren
*'Electra' & 'Wit'* 23

### BOOKS

**Kaddish**
*by Leon Wieseltier*
Dennis O'Brien 25

**Beyond Darkness**
*by Shirley Du Boulay*
David Toolan 27

**The Life of Thomas More**
*by Peter Ackroyd*
Marcia L. Colish 28

**The Higher Jazz**
*by Edmund Wilson*
*edited by Neale Reinitz*
David Castronovo 30

**Church and Revolution**
*by Thomas Bokenkotter*
**World Christianity and Marxism**
*by Denis R. Janz*
John A. Coleman 32

**The Death Penalty in America**
*edited by Hugo Adam Bedau*
**The Death Penalty**
*by James J. Megivern*
Edward McGlynn Gaffney, Jr. 34

### THE LAST WORD

**The church everyone leaves**
Roy Darcus 39



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## To the Editors

### Tasmanian delight

I think I may be the *Commonweal* reader closest to the South Pole, down here in the "roaring forties" latitude of Tasmania, though there may be a New Zealander or Argentine that might outdo me.

I have long been a fan of the Robert Shaw Chorale and Keith C. Burris's November 6, 1998, "Music as Sacrament" was a godsend! Karl Haas's regular Saint Patrick's Day program on "Adventures in Good Music," which we get here, features the group's "The Wearing of the Green," sung with all the vigour and feeling that Burris speaks of in his article.

With thanks. (REV.) PETER MCGRATH
*Riverside, Tasmania*

### Indulgence granted

"Indulge Us" (*Commonweal*, December 18, 1998) was right on target in pointing out the snide treatment by the *New York Times* of the Catholic practice of indulgences (front page *Times*, no less.)

The relation of indulgences to the Jewish practice of the *kaddish* as explained in your editorial was, just three days later, reinforced by a review in the *Times* (December 21, 1998) of Leon Wieseltier's book *Kaddish*. According to the reviewer, Jewish Gehenna is akin to the Christian concept of purgatory, and, in Gehenna, Jewish souls spend twelve months purging their sins by fire. But, says the reviewer, each recitation of the *kaddish* "freezes the fires of Gehenna for ninety minutes; no more, no less."

As your editorial said, "One might ask if the *Times* would be quite as supercilious in reporting on the traditional Jewish practice of saying *kaddish*." In light of the review, apparently not. THOMAS M. CURRAN
*Auburn, Ala.*

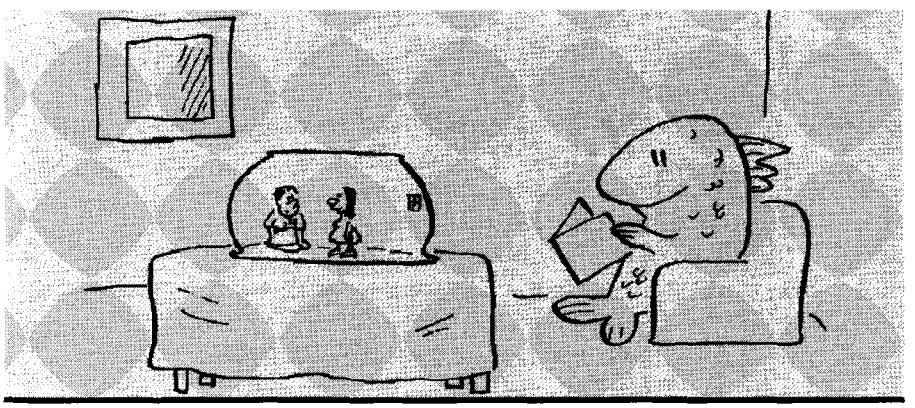
### Self-indulgent?

Well, you certainly told the *New York Times* about indulgences! Someone should tell the pope about the *Times* and how they will snigger: maybe he wouldn't lead with such a weak card, one Tetzel and Luther and maybe even you and I cannot understand outside of cultural Catholicism, so nostalgically evoked by John Cogley in "Christmas Past" [same issue].

Your Jewish/*kaddish* analogy came close to an explanation, if such is possible. Did you pick a Jewish example at random from world religions? Why do I doubt not?

No doubt your final sentence in the indulgence editorial will cause a queue of *Times*men to the nearest Roman Catholic church for instruction in the faith.

Meanwhile, kudos to Sidney Callahan ("Forgive Me, Father") for seeing some of the church's "confessional tactlessness." DR. GREGORY P. STEIN
*Buffalo, N.Y.*



### The editors reply:

The *kaddish* analogy was chosen for two reasons. First, Christianity's roots are Jewish and knowledge of Judaism deepens our understanding of our own faith. Second, *Kaddish*, Leon Wieseltier's fascinating new book (reviewed on page 25), had made an impression on the editors.

Finally, we have even fewer illusions about our influence on the *Times* than does Dr. Stein. But neither do we have any illusions about the infallibility of the *Times*.

### Bumpy path to Rome

To mark the last ninety-five days of anesthesia practice before my recent retirement, I read one of Luther's Ninety-Five Theses each day. Having just read *Exsurge domine* (1520) to finish up, I was tickled to read of a new bull on indulgences. I'm not sure I understand it all, but it did make me wonder what the current Lutheran-Roman flap was all about. If we basically agree on justification, why does Rome keep dusting off what sounds like "semi-Pelagianism"? Why does the church keep shooting itself in its feet? This Lutheran does not feel in full communion with the Reformed, the Presbyterian church, or the United Church of Christ — but yearning for Rome and an end to disunity is getting a little dicey.

DR. WINTHROP P. WILCOX, JR.
*Lancaster, Pa.*

### Underappreciated

My experience with confession is quite different from Sidney Callahan's ["Forgive Me, Father," December 18, 1998], but my journey is undoubtedly different as well. Raised Catholic and married in the church to a non-Christian some twenty-five years ago, shortly afterward I had had enough of the church and left with no intention of coming back. After some very tough times and one very good priest, I startled myself and my family by return-

*(Continued on page 36)*



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# The rule of law

The House Republicans have made their case to the Senate for the impeachment of President Bill Clinton. The charges—the president perjured himself and obstructed justice in an effort to hide the facts of his sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky—were numbingly familiar. No new revelations emerged about the extent of Clinton's duplicity or his alleged "conspiracy" to influence the sworn testimony of Monica Lewinsky and his secretary Betty Currie. Also numbingly familiar appears to be the strictly party-line reaction to the House's presentation and what looks to be the likely conclusion of this whole sad and bitter conflict—a party-line vote to acquit.

As we go to press, Clinton's lawyers will begin presenting the president's version of the facts to the Senate. This will be the first time the president's legal representatives have a roughly equal opportunity to subject the House's impeachment case and the Starr report to extended legal and public scrutiny. In doing so, the lawyers will undoubtedly attempt to show that Clinton did not violate the technical legal definition of perjury. Much of this argument will also be familiar—and unpersuasive. Clinton's lawyers will also endeavor to show that the president's leading conversations with Currie and the efforts to find Lewinsky a job outside of government fall short of any reasonable definition of "obstruction." Clinton's legal team may have more luck refuting the obstruction charge. But most important, the president's lawyers will make the constitutional case that even if the president is guilty as charged by the House, his offenses do not rise to the level of "high crimes and misdemeanors," and therefore do not warrant removal from office.

It should be clear, even to those who have been appalled by the excesses of the Starr investigation and the rank hypocrisy of some of Clinton's Republican adversaries, that this president has little affinity for the truth. Yes, he was the victim of an out-of-control prosecutor and a transparently political sexual harassment law suit brought by Paula Jones. Those facts should mitigate his punishment, but they cannot excuse his actions. Fair-minded people disagree about what sanctions should be imposed against Clinton. A small but significant number of Americans think his lying and effort to manipulate the system disqualify him from office. The majority of Americans, however, continue to think that the president's crimes do not justify eviction from the White House. That prudent conclusion has much to recommend it.

Republicans in the House insist that failure to remove Clinton for lying effectively places him "above the law." It is the "rule of law," not the exposure of private sexual sin, that is at stake, proclaimed Henry Hyde (R-Ill.) in his florid summing up of the House's case to the Senate. But law must be rooted—and be seen to be rooted—in our most basic sense of justice and fairness. Whatever Clinton's moral failings, most Americans worry that the case against him looks too much like entrapment. That Starr's lengthy and free-wheeling investigations into Whitewater and related matters led to little more than charges of perjury about an essentially private matter is deeply troubling. Nor is the "rule of law" upheld by the prosecution of every crime or by the imposition of the maximum sentence against every offender. In fact, the unchecked prosecutorial power wielded by the office of independent counsel, not Clinton's adolescent prevarications, has come to symbolize the abuse of the rule of



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law for many Americans.

President Clinton is not above the law. He should be prosecuted for perjury and any other credible charges. How and when he should be held accountable is the question. A good case can be made for prosecuting him after he leaves office. As former Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell has said, legally the circumstances surrounding perjury determine the punishment. Our sense of justice requires that punishment fit the crime. Clinton's pathetic offenses hardly rise to the level of treason or in any way constitute an assault on the constitutional order. It seems wildly disproportionate to remove him from office for his lies about Monica Lewinsky. For the duty of the Senate—where senators are both jurors and judges—is not only to evaluate the facts but also to determine how the law should be applied. As such, senators have an obligation to keep the bigger picture in mind—including the dangerous precedent set by partisan impeachment and its threat to the balance of power among the branches of government.

In his refusal to tell the truth or to place his nation's interest before his own survival, Clinton has revealed himself to be a sorry excuse for a political, let alone a moral, leader. But Clinton's example need not be followed by the senators now sitting in judgment on him. They should be able to place the greater good of the nation and the integrity of the Constitution above narrow partisan interests. They should rise above the standard set by the man in the dock as well as the excesses of the president's political opponents.

NOTEBOOK

# SEVENTY-FIVE FAT YEARS

## Coming soon to a bookstore near you

One-hundred-and-twenty-five bound volumes of *Commonweal* sit on our office shelves (1924-1998). The first issue appeared on November 12, 1924, and the 75th anniversary issue will appear on November 19, 1999, all part of the unstinting efforts of editors, writers, and reviewers to make sense of the Catholic and American encounter. Seventy-five years is something to celebrate. And we will.

In fact, we began this past summer when each of those volumes of *Commonweal* was scrutinized for an anthology. Patrick Jordan, our managing editor, took the lead in coordinating this massive effort. We were each assigned two decades (or more). In all, some hundreds of items were proposed. Then came the hard part. Choosing. Sometimes the discussion was as heated as the one that first ended in publication. Others were shoo-ins.

There were favorites, of course, that didn't make it: G.K. Chesteron on "Religion and Sex," from that very first issue is briefly excerpted across the page. One of my own favorites never had a chance: Michael Williams's series covering the 1925 Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee, did not pass our first principle of selection, continuing relevance. The trial was a landmark case, but today it belongs in the history books. Unlike H.L. Mencken who famously mocked the "rubes," Williams brought a discerning eye to the town, to the defendants, the prosecutors, and the issues. But he did go on. Of course, he was editor. And you know what *prima donnas* they can be. Another favorite of mine did make it: George Shuster's 1938 dispatch from Vienna on the German invasion of Austria; an example of Nazi terrorism and the awful collusion in that of the Catholic church.

Reading back issues of *Commonweal* naturally brings on the editorial itch. All those periodic sentences, all those adjectives! And yet: all those editorials, articles, reviews that year after year did exactly what needed to be done.

The computer skills of our long-suffering interns—Grant Gallicho, Christian Zwahlen, Tim Reidy, and Drew Rosado—were put to good use. The final selections were scanned in August and September. While we avoided an immense retyping job, we created an immense proofreading job. Nothing scans like the human eye. A general introduction by Peter Steinfels and section introductions by Paul Baumann will round out the volume.

Look for the anthology to appear next fall, published by Simon & Schuster; title to come.

All of which brings to mind the man who kept the wolf from the door.

The man responsible for a remarkable portion of those editorials, articles, and reviews has finally agreed to take it easy—but not too easy. Edward S. Skillin, on the staff for sixty-four years and publisher for thirty-one, officially retired June 30, 1998. No surprise—he continued to come to the office almost daily as a volunteer. He celebrated his 95th birthday, January 23, 1999. At last, he has agreed to take it easier. He will work from home doing his usual superb job of proofreading, including distinguishing the accent *aigu* from the accent *grave*, getting *umlauts* over the right vowel, and on the rare occasion when numbers appear in these pages, he will add, subtract, multiply, or divide, as the case requires. Edward, *ad multos annos*.

MARGARET O'BRIEN STEINFELS



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*Throughout 1999,* Commonweal *will be celebrating its 75th anniversary. Here from the very first issue, November 12, 1924, is an excerpt from "Religion and Sex" by* ***G.K. Chesterton****, essayist, poet, and author of the Father Brown stories.*

Stated in its human terms the plan is substantially this. That love which makes youth beautiful, and is the natural spring of so much song and romance, has for its final aim and issue a creative act, the founding of a family. While it is a creative act like that of an artist it is also a collective act like that of a small community. It is, perhaps, the one artistic work in which collaboration is a success and indeed a necessity. It takes two to make a quarrel, especially a lovers' quarrel. It also takes two to make a lovers' agreement that their love shall be put before their quarrels. But by definition the agreement of the two is not merely the concern of the two, but, in a very terrible sense, of others. The founding of a family, like all creative acts, is an awful responsibility. In other words, the founding of a family means the feeding of a family, the training, teaching, and watching of a family. It is a work for a lifetime, and most married lives are too short for it. This continuity is secured, not by "marriage laws," which our modern plutocracies can pull about as they please, but by a voluntary vow or invocation of God made by both parties, that they will help each other in this work until death. For those who believe in God and also believe in the meaning of words, it is final and irrevocable....

In short, we do not in the least believe in the greater happiness promised to mankind by the dissolution of life-long loyalties; we do not feel the slightest respect for the crude and sentimental rhetoric in which it is recommended to us. But the practical result of our conviction and our confidence is this: that when people say to us, "Your system is quite unsuited to the modern world," we answer, "If that is so, things look rather rotten for the poor old modern world."

G.K. CHESTERTON

OF SEVERAL MINDS

**WILLIAM PFAFF**

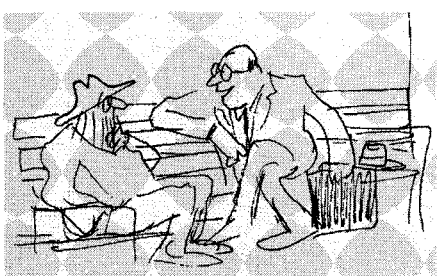
## WHO'S DRIVING

*The market's dilemma*

The proposition that the stock market will keep going up because the U.S. government cannot afford to let it go down is a new aspect of the American version of corporate socialism: public support for investors, justified by the fact that if things go badly for them they will go worse for everyone else.

The rest of the world is included in this since the amount of foreign money invested on Wall Street is the largest in history, and because as the economist David Hale writes, the world economy depends "on a robust U.S. equity market to sustain America's role as the world economy's spender of last resort."

Everyone is implicated more deeply than they would like to be. Alan Greenspan could destroy the market bubble—if it is a bubble—with a maladroit phrase. His scheduled appearances before the U.S. Congress's House Ways and Means Committee are anticipated with fear and trembling by many, Mr. Greenspan himself possibly among them.



*"Okay, so you didn't earn a dime in your peak earning years, now let's not panic...."*

Back when the market was 3,000 points lower, his comment about its "irrational exuberance" produced an immediate plunge. It came back; but will it come back next time? Whatever Mr. Greenspan's opinions, he is now muzzled by the fact that he is a walking embodiment of the principle in physics that the subject of an observation is altered by being observed. What Mr. Greenspan thinks about stock-market prosperity is integral to that prosperity. Even his silences are dangerous.

The managers of investment funds are in a yet-more-desperate situation. Even if they think the bubble is about to burst they dare not leave the market, because if the bubble were not to burst, or there proved to be no bubble at all, they would be ruined for having pulled their clients' money out of the stampede to riches.



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If they stay in, and there is a bubble and it bursts, they would be just another manager who got it wrong. Clients will be forgiving—those who still have any money.

One manager said on CNN recently that his fund's management tells him, "We want you to perform. We want you to keep up with the Standard & Poor's 500." He added, "But I'm scared stiff. I hate buying....I have no choice."

In this way the law of gravity has been repealed, or so it is said. Market operators can't get off the train. They look to Alan Greenspan to offer them an easy descent. But he can't get off the train either. If all of them are not getting off the train, why should anyone else?

Why should anyone be bothered by the fact that most Internet companies whose stocks lead the stampede have yet to make any money? The romance of business is that you sell the dream.

It hasn't worked before. The Big Bull Market, when Americans were singing "It Ain't Gonna Rain No More," ran into the Crash. But possibly history has also been repealed.

Today the collateral damage from a crash would be international, although worst in the United States, where everyone's pension plans and savings depend on the market, and the market has become the driving force in the American economy.

Managers no longer manage for quality, the good of the company, its future, its market share, or for their own power and prestige. Certainly not for the good of the work force and the community. They manage for the good opinion of fund managers, by way of their quarterly earnings report. If their company's stock does not go up every quarter they are out. That's all that counts.

Consumers go on buying, not because they have money in hand, but because they have a theory about future money. On paper, those who are in the market are richer than they have ever been before, and they expect to become richer. That theory is what moves the market.

If they start to doubt their theory, they will stop buying, company profits will falter, and then the stock market will fall and they will have lost their money. This may not have been explained to them in so many words, but that is how they are behaving, and it is an entirely logical way to behave.

Or so it is, up to a point—a point which cannot be determined. One might consider this a vast confidence swindle, but no one is directing it, and so long as it goes on, no one is swindled. To go on, it requires the full faith and participation of everyone. It is not a vast illusion either, since so long as everyone plays along everyone does well.

It seems to be an economist's version of what game theorists call the "prisoner's dilemma": So long as all parties cooperate, the risk to each is minimized. Will they continue to cooperate, and for how long? If I knew, I wouldn't dare tell you. □

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OF SEVERAL MINDS

## ABIGAIL McCARTHY

# BETTER SCHOOLS

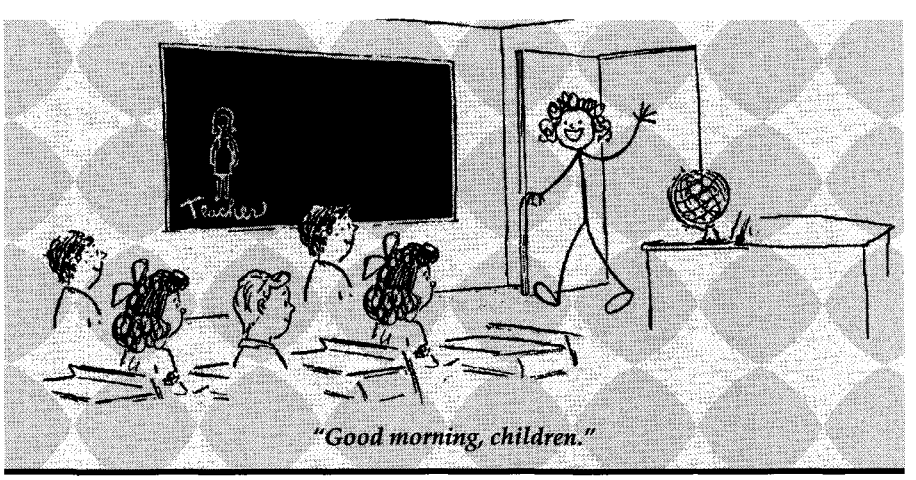
*It takes money & standards*

In her Christmas television special this past year, singer Jessye Norman interspersed her songs with tributes to the teachers who were influential in her life. They, in turn, spoke of her with pride and affection and reminisced about the girl they had known. Her education had made a difference in her life, and in theirs. That was clear.

I know how pleased they felt. One of the most heart-warming letters I received in 1998 was from the alumnae office of the college where I taught, telling me that I was a nominee for the year's award as a teacher who made a difference in the lives of students. It is many years since I taught and to be still remembered today as such a teacher is gratifying indeed.

Both Jessye Norman's teachers, I suspect, and I taught in schools where strong beneficial relationships between teacher and student could develop and were made possible by the atmosphere and requirements of the school community. A spate of news stories after the November election made it clear that such schools have been rare in recent years. According to William Booth in the *Washington Post* (November 23, 1998), the overriding concern to voters was schools—more important to them than crime, the environment, abortion rights, or the economy. The winning governors and state legislators were those who pledged to make their schools better. This was true the length and breadth of the country—in California, Wisconsin, Michigan, Florida, and Texas.

What has happened to the schools to




*"Good morning, children."*



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cause such concern? There was a time—not so long ago—when a high school diploma was a school's assurance that its graduate was prepared to enter college or to join the work force. A diploma was a student's recommendation and a certificate of accomplishment. And it meant that the student had significant test scores. Unfortunately, this is no longer true. The diploma now is often no more than a record of having put in time and of being promoted from year to year without necessarily any substantive academic achievement.

The resultant circumstances are dismaying to say the least. In California, half of the graduates going into the state's university system need remedial classes in math and writing, and these graduates were in the top third of their graduating class! Even worse, Pacific Bell found that only one in seven high school graduates had enough math and language skills to qualify as a telephone operator.

Although present-day California, once a shining example of good public education, now ranks near the bottom on education assessment tests—its fourth graders were in last place with Louisiana in reading and ranked only just above Mississippi in math—it is not alone in dismaying statistics. In the state of Virginia, remedial courses for students in its colleges are estimated to cost $40 million a year. Only $15 million of this amount is borne by the students and their families; the rest is a burden on the taxpayers. The State Council of Higher Education is preparing a proposal to require local systems to issue a "warranty" on their graduates and to promise to pay the cost of remedial classes taken by students in college.

Virginia had earlier imposed guidelines for what should be taught in schools and when. Educators now plan a follow-up with a series of examinations to test the students' grasp of these things. (One wonders why this was not the measure of a school's effectiveness prior to imposing financial incentives like warranties.)

Other states are trying varying methods of turning the schools around. Maryland has a new list of required "content standards," something like the Virginia guidelines. These are the facts, topics, and skills that educators have agreed children need to learn at various stages in their school life. The published list is impressive. By the end of the fifth grade, for example, they will be expected to know the components of the U.S. Constitution in the subject of government, be able to read and interpret information from such tools as maps in geography, as well as to understand and use fractions, decimals, percentages, and other material of this difficulty in math. By the end of high school, they should be able to analyze the roles of political parties, campaigns, and elections in U.S. politics; evaluate the changes brought about by the end of the cold war; and be able to use calculators, spread-sheet databases, and graphing programs, as well as algebra and geometry. By 2004, all students will be required to pass a series of new statewide tests on this content in order to earn a diploma.

(Interestingly enough, Maryland, in contrast to Virginia, seems to have gone


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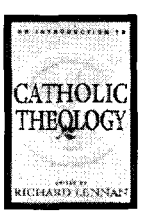


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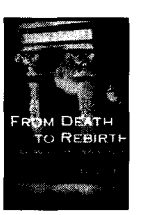


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at this backwards. Eight years before the guidelines were issued, all elementary and middle school students had to take the Maryland Student Performance Assessment Program—a series of tests intended to hold schools to higher standards. Some people argue that such a program was necessary to show people the importance of standards, and this may well be true. Certainly indifference to standards helped bring about the precipitous decline in school accomplishment.)

The District of Columbia is putting its hope for school improvement in the Stanford Achievement Test Series, Ninth Edition. Students are to take a battery of tests in math and reading in the fall and again in the spring. Principals will be evaluated annually on how the students do, and students who do not do well will have to attend summer school. The District is also facing up to a situation all school systems face—the problem of incompetent or poorly motivated teachers. The District's superintendent, Arlene Ackerman, has instituted a new speeded-up evaluation process of District teachers. There is now a ninety-day probationary period after an unsatisfactory evaluation, And once dismissed, a teacher cannot return to any school in the system unless he or she wins an appeal. Nothing is as important to a school system as good teachers; eliminating the poor ones is bound to help.

Will any and all of these efforts solve the problem? Schools today exist in a world where there is a general relaxation of standards everywhere, where television is often deleterious to students' attention spans and imaginative power, and where many students come from backgrounds with no appreciation of education. Still Gray Davis, new governor of California and a strong proponent of education, is probably right when he says "higher expectations will bring about substantial improvement." Then schools will once again be places in which dedicated teachers thrive and students benefit. □

*Kevin P. Glynn*

# 'DOUBLE EFFECT'

## Getting the argument right

In its 1997 decisions denying that Americans have a constitutional right to physician-assisted suicide (*Quill* v. *Vacco* and *Washington* v. *Glucksberg*), the United States Supreme Court recognized the moral distinction between actively helping patients to kill themselves, on the one hand, and, on the other, withholding treatment from a terminally ill patient, thereby permitting death. In so doing, the Court gave legal standing to the ethical principle of double effect. Briefly stated, the principle holds that an act intended for a morally good purpose may have an unintended but permissible bad effect.

For most informed Catholics and for many others, including secular ethicists, this recognition was a welcome development. For centuries, ethicists and moral theologians have accepted the validity of the principle and have applied it in many areas of ethical decision making, including warfare and medical care. Caregivers and patients of all religions rely on the principle to resolve problem cases—for example, to justify the use of powerful pain-relieving drugs in the care of terminally ill patients, despite some risk that the drugs may hasten death. Pastors and chaplains reassure patients and families that relieving pain is part of compassion, that what is intended determines what is morally right in specific actions, and that we are not required to undergo unduly painful treatments that may bankrupt our families. Though human life is sacred, we may ethically place our lives at risk to serve even higher values.

But the decisions in *Quill* and *Glucksberg* do not mean that the campaign in favor of assisted suicide has met anything like final defeat. (Note, most recently, the failed attempt in last November's election to legalize it in Michigan, and Dr. Jack Kevorkian's made-for-television euthanizing.) The Supreme Court placed no bar against state legislation giving physicians license to honor patients' requests for help in ending their lives, and the first Oregonians have already taken advantage of the state's legalization of the practice, even as pharmacists argue about whether it is morally licit to fill prescriptions for lethal drugs. The Court record in *Quill* suggests, moreover, that several justices might be willing to reconsider the question of assisted suicide if there is not widespread improvement in the provision of palliative care for the terminally ill. That nudge to policy makers and the public constitutes a significant challenge to the nation.

The decision itself has brought a sort of backlash. Though the more thoughtful advocates of assisted suicide concede that it should be a last resort, they are lobbying, state by state, to give the practice status before the law. That entails working to discredit the principle of double effect and to eliminate the distinction between actively aiding death and passively allowing it to occur. Of two commentaries appearing in the widely read *New England Journal of Medicine* for October 23, 1997—four months after the *Quill* decision came down—one praised it for recognizing the crucial distinction and for supporting improved palliative care for the terminally ill. But the other writer, after pointing out that sedation can be prescribed without the patient's knowledge or consent, likened it to slow euthanasia. The writer expressed unwillingness to trust physicians' good intentions, and argued that assisted suicide offers less risk of abuse because



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it demands action by the patient.

In its issue of December 11, 1997, the same journal published a critique of double effect that supported providing patients with death-producing agents which they themselves take. The senior author, Dr. Timothy Quill, was the unsuccessful plaintiff in the New York case ruled on by the Supreme Court. The principle of double effect, he contended, cannot be used to justify sedation in terminal cases because if other life-prolonging therapies are withdrawn, the physician may be covertly seeking to hasten death. Dr. Quill said that if a patient requests withdrawal of some heroic type of therapy, such as a mechanical ventilator for advanced emphysema, in the hope of being able to live awhile unencumbered by medical technology, that good intention would satisfy the requirements of double effect. But if the patient or doctor requests withdrawal, intending to reduce suffering by hastening death, the principle of double effect would not be applicable, because its validity rests on a good intention.

Dr. Quill damned double effect on other grounds as well. He worried that physicians will be confused trying to read patients' minds and to determine their real intent. He argued that because the principle arose and was refined within the context of a particular religious tradition (Christianity), we in America ought not apply it across our society. He noted that under our legal system, individuals, including physicians, are responsible for all reasonably foreseeable consequences of action, not just those intended. He suggested that physicians who justify the use of sedatives in the care of terminal patients under the protective umbrella of double effect may violate the right of patients to act autonomously. Finally, he indicted double effect by implying that its absolute prohibition against directly causing death makes physicians reluctant to honor patients' requests to withdraw life-sustaining therapy.

Dr. Quill, with co-authors Dan Brock and Bernard Lo, recycled these arguments in another article published December 17, 1997, in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. They again faulted double effect as an ethical basis for palliative sedation in terminal cases because it depends on accepting the intention of the patient and physician to alleviate suffering rather than purposefully to shorten life. Patients' wishes, they argued, should trump physicians' intentions as a moral basis for action. And they suggested that physician-assisted suicide is the most honest and open way to address end-of-life dilemmas.

These writers and other proponents of assisted suicide continue to misinterpret (and cloud) the distinction between causing death and allowing it to occur. As Daniel Callahan has pointed out (*The Troubled Dream of Life*, 1993), to equate allowing to die with killing places an overwhelming moral burden on people. It tries to move death out of the realm of the natural and make it a medical responsibility. Put a healthy person on a ventilator and then remove it. Nothing happens. Absent underlying pathology, allowing someone to die is impossible. Doctors have long stopped treatments not judged to be working. It is a cynical distortion to say that they thereby intend death. If it is true that double effect is subject to abuse by patient or doctor or both, as Dr. Quill & Co. suggest, surely the same is doubly or triply true of physician-assisted suicide. These authors simply assume good faith on the part of all participants in PAS, while putting in question the honesty and/or competence of physicians, patients, and family members who concur in the substitution of palliative care, including sedation, for failed or overly onerous therapies.

Proponents of assisted suicide need to attack the principle of double effect because if it is seen as valid, then palliative care has a strong ethical basis and greatly weakens the case for assisted suicide. Control of pain and suffering is an important part of good palliative care. Not incidentally, a lesson learned from hospice care has been that the brain's respiratory centers become tolerant to opiates and sedatives, so that patients receiving these drugs for pain and anxiety rarely sustain respiratory suppression.

The principle of double effect is an ethical pillar of therapy for terminal illness, and validating it promotes humane care for the dying. The more broadly it is grasped and practiced, the less attractive will be the vision of physicians erasing the most basic commandment of their profession: "First, do no harm." □

**Kevin P. Glynn, M.D.,** *is president of the medical staff at Mercy Hospital in San Diego, and was founding chair of the hospital's biomedical ethics committee.*

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# THE WOMEN IN MY LIFE

## *An intuition about the celibate male priesthood*

**Frans Jozef van Beeck**

Caution to the reader: This is *not* going to be an argument either for or against the ordination of women, nor, for that matter, the ordination of men. But something came to me, as follows.

I don't know exactly *when* it came. What I do know is this: it had not yet come to me on Tuesday, May 12, and it was quietly sitting in a shadowy corner of my mind in the late afternoon of Wednesday, May 13. It obviously had not been a case of breaking and entering; when I noticed it, it felt more like a drop of water falling on a sponge, or a quiet guest having come in through the back door, for a visit.

What I got to entertain was an intuition, and an unlikely one to boot. It was not a "concept" I had "developed." So I knew I was not master of the situation. Yet I must entertain it, for all it said was: "Think again." So here I go—thinking, not taking sides.

In the early seventies, I had finally gotten over my worst fears of women. In all probability, I had developed those fears at least partly under the influence of notable absences. Thus, not until I began my university education in Amsterdam in 1954, at the age of twenty-four, with six years of pre-Vatican but exciting Jesuitry under my belt, did I have a woman teacher. *One.* And she has remained the only one—a fact most Americans find nearly impossible to imagine. She taught me first- and second-year English: grammar, syntax, pronunciation, phonetics, idiom, and conversation. Previous to that, all my professors in classics, art history, and the various philosophical disciplines had been Jesuit priests. Before I entered the order, all my *gymnasium* teachers (several of whom had doctorates and two of whom became university professors of distinction) had been men; even my grade-school teachers had been men; I was educated by Immaculate Conception brothers, laymen, and Jesuit priests. Intellectually as well as factually, I was educated in a male world. The only women in the classroom I can recall befell us in grade school: the nurse who paid her annual visit to check us for eyesight and our heads for lice, and the school physician who discovered I had an inguinal hernia when I was eleven, just young enough to be an acceptable surgery patient at the Children's Hospital in The Hague, where the wards were mixed.

By contrast, the women in my *life* till I was forty were numerous; the problem was that almost all of them (a clutch of aunts and cousins were the exception) were distant. They were the young university women who walked into and out of the corners of my eyes, discouraged by my black suit and Roman collar. Long before that, there had been the countless girls who became the objects of my teen-age attention; three or four got to feel not just my interest but also my hands—a dangerous thing to do except under cover of darkness, for the Jesuits had a way of letting on that you were either a student at Aloysius College or seen in female company. (Once, when I was seventeen, the assistant principal summoned me, inquiring darkly about the young woman with the New Look flowery below-the-knee dress in whose company I "had been seen" at a piano recital in Diligentia Hall.) With the wisdom of age, I now realize that at home, for about six years, I had a strained relationship with my sister, five years younger than myself—something that upset my father. Last but far from least, there was my mother: intense, unconventional, with seven years of education, strong views on most things, a lifelong appetite for reading, and a fierce love of the church.

Not until I was nearly forty did I actually get to *meet* women, most of them undergraduates. For years, the encounters were clumsy and often laden with ambiguity. But I did learn, especially from mature women who were both affectionate and unafraid. Yet not until I was fifty-seven did I meet a woman colleague without fear (expectation?) of sexual, or at least erotic, involvement. Now, at the age of sixty-eight, I have five very close women friends (yes, K., G., J., M., W., I mean you, of course) who have come to "love me well"

*"My guru."*

**Frans Jozef van Beeck, S.J.** *is senior professor of theology at Loyola University (Chicago), and author of the multivolume systemic theology,* God Encountered *(Liturgical Press).*



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(as W. likes to put it) and whom I, too, have come to "love well." By "well," I mean "spirit, soul, and body, blamelessly" (1 Thess. 5:23). What a splendid handful. Praise be to God for integrated love. I am making this confession as an adult *and* as an intensely happy man of God.

But what is equally striking is that I now have literally dozens of women friends, including married women, who would make terrific, competent, loving priests. (Actually, some of them dearly want to be priests.) They are about as numerous as the dozens of men I know and love, married and unmarried, who are making/could make/would make/will make competent, mature, loving priests. All of them are (that is, they are *becoming*, some faster than others) *humane lovers*—loyal and deep, in God, in Christ, in the Spirit. A deep (if sometimes painful) satisfaction, this.

Now wait a minute, *where did all this stuff come from?* I started this piece with a reference to women's ordination and instead I am confessing to my personal history with women (albeit without the less virtuous details, most of which have been graciously turned, over time, into sources of wisdom and emblems of God's creative mercy). I do know the answer to that question: wherever sexual differentiation and attraction arise, life turns stressful. Such elemental facts will raise the most fundamental human issues: issues of faith, hope, love, and theology. No wonder the final editor of Genesis puts sexual differentiation cheek by jowl with God: "And God created man in his own image; in God's image he created him; man and woman he created them" (Gen. 1:27). An all-male priesthood is such a stressful situation, and the all-male *celibate* priesthood of which I have been part for thirty-five years even more. So it is not all *that* surprising that I just found myself jumping straight from women's ordination to the story of my growth toward maturity in regard to women.

Let me get back to the credentials, though. As early as August 1974, I got involved in the discussion of the ordination of eleven women by retired Episcopal Bishop Edward R. Welles. That September I read a paper at the annual meeting of the North American Academy of Ecumenists, in which I disagreed, reluctantly, with Bishop Arthur Vogel, at whose urging the Episcopal bishops had declared the ordination of the "Philadelphia Eleven" null and void. The late George Cornell of Associated Press had kindly helped me prepare a statement for the press to make sure that my views would be reported correctly. I had no taste for a public fight, for the entertainment of the American public-at-large, between the Episcopal bishop of Kansas City, Missouri, and a Dutch-born Jesuit. But here I was, in the thick of it: fairly soon my paper appeared in a theological journal, followed by a piece in a Swiss opinion journal run by Jesuits and an essay in a collection on women's ordination put together by two Episcopalians. In one of these pieces, I warned, ominously, that "both women and men could lose their integrity by seeking ordination."

Theologically, where *do* I stand on the issue? In 1969, the Dutch Jesuit Haye van der Meer argued in his doctoral dissertation (published in 1973 as *Women Priests in the Catholic*


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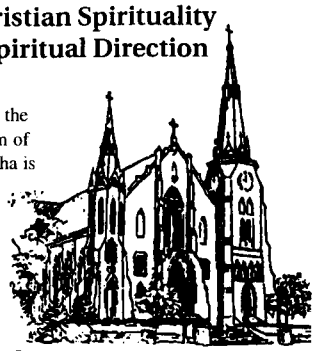

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*Church?*) that the current theological arguments fail to clinch the case *against* the ordination of women. Haye has long recanted this position. I still hold to it. In spite of this, I have never seen fit to join other theologians in positively supporting, let alone advocating, the ordination of women. Still, I *have* assured one Anglican bishop who voted in favor of women's ordination at Lambeth that I could see the force of his arguments. Finally, I did decide that the issue as raised in the U.S. Catholic church today distracted from even more central matters of faith; accordingly, up to now I have respected, if with some inner reluctance, Pope John Paul II's urgent call for a moratorium.

Then, last May, I got this visit from an unexpected "guest." What is it? What does it mean?

This is what came to me: *sacraments are both real and provisional.* We profess "one baptism for the forgiveness of sins," but that eschatological affirmation must remind us that baptism in water, while *really* making us children of God only puts us *on the way* to the *eschaton*. We *really* receive the gift of the Spirit, but as a *pledge*, not a consummation. The Lord Jesus is *"truly, really, and substantially"* present in the Eucharist; yet he is present as the Absent One, calling us to growth in unity in love by the giving of our lives, feeding us as we travel, *for the time being*; besides, only *select* elements of the cosmos itself—bread and wine, "the work of human hands"—are transformed, as Irenaeus wrote eighteen hundred years ago. So Mass is neither kingdom come nor the new heaven and the new earth *in full actuality*. We *really* receive God's forgiveness in the sacrament of penance, yet we know from experience that we will have reason to return, often with better grounds for compunction as our consciences get more refined; thus we learn how to join Jesus in willingly taking responsibility for the sins of others. Those among us who are married *genuinely* embody the mutual love of Christ and the church, but married people are reminded every day that promises are not predictions; Christian marriage is a *school* of perfect love, not an achieved state of eschatological perfection. And just what does the anointing of the sick symbolize and embody? Return to health? Readiness for the last breath? Assurance of God's mercy in front of the dark portal of death? In the world of sacramentality it's all very real, but also very provisional. "Sacraments are *for the interim*, like the church itself," my teacher Pieter Smulders used to repeat back in the sixties. While indelibly marked by God's image, God's people travel precariously, supported by holy signs and symbols, *en route* to that holiest moment: the vision of God face-to-face.

So why should we expect the sacrament of orders to be

## Yves Congar on patience

*Yves Congar (1904–95) was a French Dominican ecclesiologist whose work bore fruit at Vatican II. In 1950, at a time of theological tension in the Catholic church, he wrote* True and False Reform in the Church, *which he revised in 1968. Initially, its circulation was restricted by Rome, which adds resonance to the selection that follows. Drawing upon Scripture, tradition, and the magisterium, Congar outlined four conditions for authentic church reform: the primacy of charity and pastoral care, the preservation of communion among all the faithful, patience, and a true development based not upon novelty but on a return to the sources of tradition. The following excerpt, previously untranslated and rendered here by Christopher Ruddy, concerns the essential role of patience in church reform.*

The innovator, whose reform turns into schism, lacks patience. He does not respect the delays of God and of the church, the delays of life. He moves with a rigid and exasperated logic toward "all-or-nothing" solutions, in which viable elements are cast off with all others. He all but puts the church in the position of living to meet his demands, or else he quits it.

In order that reform be realized *in the church*, it is necessary that it be accompanied by patience: by which I mean much more than watching the clock or presuming that everything takes time. I mean a certain disposition of soul and of spirit mindful of necessary delays, a certain humility and pliancy of spirit, the awareness of imperfections, even of inevitable ones. Jean Guitton believed it possible to characterize the Catholic mentality as one of fullness and the Protestant one as a search for purity. I am inclined to believe that Catholicism and Protestantism differ still more—in terms of temperament and the manner by which believers receive and come to their religion—in being a religion of life, and of life in its fullness, on the one hand, and a religion of searching, of purity, of searching for purity, on the other. In this regard, Protestantism is more intellectual than Catholicism. An idea can be pure; reality and life are not. Thus this condition of patience must be added to the first condition [for reform] that I have set forth: a subordination of the intellectual and the systematic to the pastoral.

Heresy comes, in large part, from a purely intellectual grasp of a single aspect [of doctrine]: a grasp which easily becomes an impatient one, freeing itself from the delays of life and from the lengthy schooling of living perception. The mind easily grasps a one-dimensional truth, but an idea, in the process of life—in being held and sustained by the life of a man or woman, in finding itself in contact with the questions and condi-



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different? Paul writes to the Galatians, who could use a good dose of eschatological freedom: "All of you who have been plunged into Christ have been invested with Christ. There *is* neither Jew nor Greek. There *is* neither slave nor freeborn. There *are* no male and female. For you are all one person in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:27–28). Now if this were actually accomplished, *that* would be kingdom come. But the fact is: while truly, really, and substantially saved from the powers that be, from prejudice racial and cultural, and from the stress of sexual differentiation and attraction, the church is *church:* sacrament of the kingdom, not kingdom come. My unexpected visitor's question was: "Could it be that the sacrament of orders is lopsided *precisely because it is a sacrament?*"

Not long ago I heard Sarah Coakley, of Harvard Divinity School, say: "The question is, how is the love we know from sexual differentiation and attraction related to the love of God?" Yes, if there were nothing more to *eros* than sociopolitical influence, equality before the law, human justice, and ethical resolve, where would human intimacy's transparency toward the God of love be? Surely the dramatic relationships involved in human love cannot be this pedestrian? Why otherwise keep the Song of Songs in the canon of Scripture? Would we not be entertaining an illusion if we believed that the joys and the vicissitudes of incarnate love are a matter of this life alone, and have nothing to do with the God of love?

But why ordain men and not women? Now here the theological ice is getting considerably thinner. Walter Ong's book *Fighting for Life* (1981) occurs to me. He explains that even before they are born, men have a far more precarious physiological and emotional balance than women do; they are born *"agonistic,"* not consensual or convivial. Also, from my friend and colleague Jim Walter, a capable bioethicist, I have learned the following: Upon fertilization, the *nucleus* of the fertilized ovum already contains the pre-embryo's own distinctive genetic code, but the fertilized ovum's *effective life* is still dominated by the massive presence of the ovum's *extranuclear* materials, which are maternal and hence *female.* Only after about two weeks does a critical move occur: the pre-embryo's *own* genetic code gets the better of the maternal materials and begins to direct the embryo's development, including (depending on the presence or absence of the Y-chromosome) its development as male or female. Sexual differentiation, in other words, does not occur until the ovum's influence ceases to be dominant; *all of us, whether male or female, begin our lives in a female mode.* Accordingly, being born male means: having faced a critical

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tions of life—develops with time other aspects, which a dialectical spirit could not have grasped on its own. Accordingly, there is an immense difference between a truth perceived solely by the mind, dialectically, and a truth matured in solitude or in faithful service, a truth that one has long carried within oneself and nourished with one's life. A too-rapid formulation—the fruit of a purely dialectical intelligence—yields a dried-out product of little inner substance.

The whole work of life, at least here on earth, presupposes delays which do not allow themselves to be breezed over or put aside. Only what has been done with the collaboration of time can conquer time. If certain decisions or changes are to be taken, it is essential that time reveal what meaning certain events concealed, what was to become of certain possibilities, whose mysterious character—often very disturbing—it may have been impossible to guess. For example, many Catholics thought, in the last third of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth, that the Holy See might do well to relinquish its temporal possessions. In 1927, when the Lateran Treaty was signed, it seemed to them a true liberation. But, could one have foreseen, in 1870, the consequences for the Holy See's freedom of this loss of sovereignty? Surely, many nineteenth-century Catholics had maintained that a church untangled from such temporal matters would be more free for action in the world. The future proved them right. However, others, to whom one cannot deny some perspicacity, predicted that the loss of temporal rule would be the ruin of the church. Time revealed the groundlessness of this position. But it was legitimate to ask whether the independence of the Holy See would be seriously damaged, and thereby one understands why the responsible powers refused to follow immediately the prophets of a freedom based on the absence of territorial guarantees.

In reality, all reform is a small anticipation of the eschatological kingdom, of its justice and of its purity. Either by their judgment and condemnation on history and its inadequate achievements, or by their constructive movement toward realizing a state of affairs approaching greater perfection and purity, revolutions and reforms are like partial anticipations of the apocalypse. The reformer is always tempted not only to begin development, but to hurry it; not only to clear the field, but to want it free from all weeds. But the Gospel parable teaches us to respect the delays in the growth of the seed and the harvest, and not to encroach upon this by an impatient search for purity, "for fear that with the weeds one also will tear out the wheat" (Matthew 13:29).

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modification in the pre-embryonic phase of life. That is practically the opposite of what Aristotle and Aquinas taught, that is, that women are men who have suffered a developmental mishap. Could it be that they could think this way because they were shaped by a "patriarchal" world, in which men are forever ready to defend themselves (and women and children, of course) by force, and to take after women and dominate them at least partly to reassure and gratify their nervous selves? Who knows?

In any case, the Catholic church has thus far considered only men valid subjects of the sacrament of orders, and Pope John Paul II has insisted that there is more than custom here. Paul VI once wrote that theologians must try to find arguments in support of magisterial teaching, and I have no reason to assume he implied that in so doing we had to trade in intellectual integrity for toadyism. In other words, in the matter of ordination, I must try to *interpret the arrangement we have* before proposing the inclusion of women in the ministry.

So here I go. Factually, the sacrament of orders is traditionally limited to men. If I am to make *theological* sense of this, I find myself appealing to the "already" and the "not yet" typical in the sacramental order *as a whole*. Obviously, this is no argument either *for* or *against* the ordination of women (or, for that matter, of men). It is an acceptance of the proposition that if orders is sacramental, there is an *a priori* plausibility of its bearing marks of *provisionality*. In Christ, men and women are *really* one, but *for the time being* the struggles and incoherences that come with sexual differentiation are still with us, as Saint Paul well saw (witness more than one passage in the first letter to the Corinthians).

Two final questions have occurred to me. The first is historical. The eminent medievalist Sir Richard Southern, in *The Making of the Middle Ages* and *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, is only one of many historians who have shown that as early as the sixth and seventh centuries, bishops and abbots were becoming part of the emergent *administrative* structure of the West; in due course, they became "peers"— peers, that is, of the barons and counts and viscounts and dukes and kings, just as the pope came to be regarded as the peer of the emperor (often to the disquiet of both). Needless to say, *both* the practice of the "spiritual sword" being wielded by the secular arm *and* the theories to justify the practice helped obscure the fact that the sacrament of orders was sacramental and not executive, let alone definitive. Small wonder the sacrament of orders became widely as well as dangerously associated with masculinity understood as power (a development unknown in the Oriental churches forced to live under Muslim domination). No wonder either that within a few hundred years, legions of disenchanted Christians in the West, including the Franciscan *spirituales* and the women who became known, in the late thirteenth century, as *beguines*, began to find the church unspiritual and the clergy secular and domineering. It is fair to suggest that preoccupation with power and jurisdiction has bedeviled the ordained ministry to this day. Accordingly, everything should be attempted to turn this around (but discerningly please, not with a vengeance).

So this is what I make of what came to me, like a thief in the night. End of confession. That is to say, an end, sort of.

Any conclusions? First off, Viagra is one of the last things we need on the way to mature masculinity. What we do need is Jesus' style of masculinity, and his theme was service, not male dominance or performance. Obviously, too, he was neither afraid of women nor embarrassed by their affection. Unconventional as he was, he was regularly seen in the company of women; he (along with his male disciples) even accepted the care of women "who used to put themselves at their service, *out of their own means*" (Luke 8:3). To the consternation of his uncomprehending disciples (who by then should have known better), he even allowed one such woman to embarrass him with far too expensive a gift, in far too maudlin a mood, a mere three days before his arrest and execution. Now she may well have been a woman of poor taste (and who knows, she may have had a bit of a past as well), but she loved; so, like Jesus himself, she sensed that he was a dead man, as good as buried. And Jesus made this scene of fond abandon part of the gospel, "in memory of her" (Mark 14:3–9; *see* Luke 7:36–50).

Could it be that part of the sacramental structure of orders is: for men to portray Jesus Christ by learning to understand and even practice the Christian things that women are congenitally *made* (as well as socially conditioned, often inexcusably) to understand and practice: emptying themselves and caring and surviving and giving life and letting themselves be sucked dry, with a toughness that is not male, either congenitally or by dint of social pressure? And, of course, by helping demonstrate that the idea of the kingdom is not for women to be nice, but to take their rightful place in the body of Christ and in the ministries that support it? That ordination must teach us male priests how to grow in patience, gentle firmness, endurance, and kindness, so as to anticipate, in imperfect but symbolic deed *and* in facing frequent but temporary distress, the things that truly *are* the last things? That this must happen by us men priests learning how to love men, women, and children, as well as the aged and the marginal of every stripe; and to love them "well"? And even as *they* count on the Holy Spirit they have received, can they count on *us*, too, who by virtue of imposition of hands are authorized, by that same Spirit, to exercise oversight, not as if we were being forced to do it, but willingly, God's way, and not out of a vulgar appetite for gain, but eagerly, not as lords over our charges, but as examples to the flock (*see* 1 Peter 5:2–3)? Could ordained ministry mean this: men encouraged and indeed ordained to live and act with inner freedom and authority, not like unbridled (if often well-intentioned) males, but in the Spirit, spending themselves by helping a whole community pray, care, and teach, *in persona Christi* ? □



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# CONSIDER TRADITION

## *A case for ordaining women*

**Rose Hoover**

As a Southerner, reverence for tradition is part of my inheritance. I cherish the traditions of my ancestors, of my region, and especially of my church. Far from alienating me, an appeal to tradition tends to warm my heart. On the other hand, since I am all too aware, again as a Southerner, of the damage wreaked by the misuse of tradition, I have begun to ponder the meaning and nature of tradition and to look critically at its role in the Christian life. What is it that makes a traditional practice honorable (a fine Southern word), not to mention valid, for a Christian? Is it the fact that we have always done it that way? Or is something more required?

I would like to consider three kinds of tradition, which I would call negative, subsidiary, and Tradition with a capital T. All three are implicated in the current controversy about the refusal of the Roman Catholic church to ordain women to the priesthood.

When I was in high school, our service club occasionally visited different churches on Sunday mornings. One denomination permitted no musical accompaniment for its robust hymn-singing because the organ is not mentioned in the Bible. This is an example of what I would call a *negative tradition*, one based on something *not done, rather than on something done*. Such an approach to tradition can be risky. After all, much of the secular and religious activity we take for granted was never done or authorized by Jesus. He never rode in an automobile, wore trousers, made a telephone call, used hosts for Communion, condemned slavery (in so many words, at least as far as we know), or ordained Gentiles to the priesthood (if he can be said to have ordained anyone).

When dealing with a negative tradition we must ask why something was never done. Would it have compromised the gospel? Is it harmful to us or to others, and therefore immoral? Did it violate cultural norms? Or was it simply that no one ever thought of it?

The second type of tradition can be illustrated by the church of my mother's childhood, whose music consisted of psalms, as these were the songs of the Bible. I think of this as a *subsidiary tradition*, one based on or developed from positive actions or sayings, but not essential to the gospel message. Although subsidiary traditions may take the form of lovely and meaningful customs, such as seasonal colors for the liturgy or singing psalms instead of hymns, they too become dangerous if they displace aspects more central to the mystery of Christ.

Catholicism's integrity rests in its tradition with a capital T. The Tradition is, first, always at the heart of the mystery of Christ, and second, generally based on the positive actions of Jesus, rather than omissions, unless those omissions are clearly at the center of the mystery. According to the *Theological Dictionary* of Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, it is crucial to distinguish Tradition from "doctrine and discipline that are traditional in the broad sense," but which do not have the "direct authority" of the revelation of God to and through the church. Celebrating the Eucharist is an obvious example of a practice belonging to the Tradition. "For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread..." (1 Cor. 11:23 NRSV). On the other hand, as the liturgical reforms of Vatican II made clear, not every detail of how the Eucharist is celebrated—even some of our most revered practices—can be claimed as part of the Tradition.

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There is no need to deprecate the value of less central traditions. They have given us powerful ways of expressing grief, comforting those in sorrow, praising God, and praying together as family or community. The sequence of readings in the Lectionary as well as our liturgical gestures are good examples of such traditions. Our most venerable traditions have reasons behind their longevity, and we should not cast them aside lightly. But even traditional practices that appear to have no rational explanation need not be abandoned, for religious practice does not require the same sort of rationale as, say, computer networking. However, ancillary practices remain vital and valid only insofar as they are consistent with the Tradition itself. They must support what the gospel teaches in other areas, such as the injunction to love God and neighbor and the call to union of all Christians in Christ and with Christ. And they must not supplant or overshadow the Tradition.

All tradition reminds us that we are never wholly creatures of the present moment. Our nature is rather to be creatures of the sacred *anamnesis*, where past, present, and future are brought together into one: "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again." While we reside in an age when the Resurrection is already a reality, at the same time we carry within us the reality of the Crucifixion, and we long for the Second Coming. It is memory which links us to the past and hope which connects us to the future. Most often, perhaps, we live in tension between the two, although at times, in graced moments, we repose in their embrace. Both the thrusting of our roots into what was and the reaching out toward what will be, toward the *eschaton*, are necessary for us as human beings.

Memory and tradition assure us that we are not merely contingent beings but part of something larger than ourselves, and that this something does not easily die. By means of our Christian traditions we live out our shared memories of Jesus and his paschal mystery, as well as of the patriarchs and matriarchs of our pre-Christian and post-Resurrection heritage.

However, our life in Christ is based not only on sacred memory, but also on hope—for Christ will come again, the dead will be raised, the reign of God will reach its ultimate fulfillment. Tradition, in hope, stretches out before us to the consummation of the messianic age, when the wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the reality of Jesus' prayer that all may be one will finally be manifest. In other words, we are going somewhere, and our tradition, while participating in eternal truths, is not and cannot be static.

"Tradition," according to Rahner and Vorgrimler, "ensures the continuance of what has been once begun." But we must be sure that what we are continuing is truly revelatory of the mystery of Christ. One of the more perverse tendencies of believers has been the use of the Bible to justify prejudice toward groups whom we believe God has chosen not to favor. When I was growing up in the segregated South, the story of Noah's drunkenness in Genesis 9 was cited as justification for the subservient status of people of African descent. If black people were in a position inferior to whites, both socially and economically, this was part of the divine plan, proceeding from the unwary actions of Noah's son Ham. To attempt to change the situation—to go to school together, to sit down at the same table, to worship together, and heaven forbid, to marry each other—would be immoral, counter to the will of God. As abhorrent as this sounds today, many well-intentioned white people believed this.

Similarly, certain biblical passages have been used to subordinate women in the church. One of the most damaging has been 1 Timothy 2:11-15, which reads in part, "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve...." In *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Baker, 1992), Richard Clark Kroeger and Catherine Clark Kroeger make a convincing case for a different translation of the passage. According to the Kroegers, the Christian community was combating certain Gnostic views, among them one which claimed that Eve was created first and then created (or was the author of) Adam. The Greek, they maintain, may more accurately be translated, "I do not permit woman to teach nor to represent herself as originator of man but she is to be in conformity [with the Scriptures]....For Adam was created first, then Eve." The passage forbids the teaching of heretical doctrine, and has no relevance to women's place in the assembly. Nonetheless, even if the verses are translated in the customary manner, any practice based on them (or on any other Scripture passage) must be read, not in isolation, but in the light of the broader Tradition of the church and of what we know of the good news of Jesus Christ. The same approach should be taken when considering the ordination of women to the priesthood.

Unfortunately, the Vatican seems too often to blur the distinctions between different kinds of traditions (*see* the examples of what is to be held definitively in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's commentary which companions *Ad tuendam fidem*; *Origins*, July 16, 1998). It may even neglect Tradition when it comes to the role of women in the church. On Pentecost, May 22, 1994, Pope John Paul II appealed to tradition in his apostolic letter, *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*: "Priestly ordination, which hands on the office entrusted by Christ to his Apostles of teaching, sanctifying, and governing the faithful, has in the Catholic church from the beginning always been reserved to men alone. This tradition has also been faithfully maintained by the Oriental churches."

The *Responsum ad dubium*, dated October 28, 1995, and signed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and Tarcisio Bertone of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, offered a clarification: "This teaching requires definitive assent, since, founded on the written Word of God, and from the beginning constantly preserved and applied in the Tradition of the church, it has been set forth infallibly by the



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ordinary and universal magisterium...."

Let us accept, at least for the sake of argument, that the constant practice of the church has indeed been an all-male priesthood. Still, if the unvarying tradition of the Catholic church has been to reserve the priesthood to men, the question of whether or not the exclusion of women from the priesthood is an authentic aspect of its Tradition remains. Is it really impossible for the church to do something Jesus did not do, especially if the proposed change has not been much of an issue up until recently? (*See* the 1976 declaration of the CDF, *Inter insigniores*, 4.)

For centuries, the male priesthood seemed to provide an effective means for the transmittal of the message of Christ, and in this sense could be seen as tradition in service of the Tradition. But what about today? What if the exclusion of women from the priesthood is jeopardizing the handing on of the Tradition? I am not just worried about the practical problem of a lack of vocations. What if the exclusionary tradition of the male priesthood is itself inimical to the gospel Tradition?

I know how heavily tradition can weigh, how morally blinding it can be. My forebears ingested racism with their mothers' milk, though they would not have thought of themselves as racists. They regarded a hierarchy of the races as God's will. They would never have joined the Ku Klux Klan or consciously harmed a person of any race. They were kind in the way they knew how to be kind. In their hearts they believed they were living in the way God had ordained for them—yet what unspeakable damage their convictions about race inflicted on generation unto generation!

In a similar fashion, we cannot let the views of the Fathers of the church or of scholasticism or even of theologians early in this century determine how women are to be viewed in the church today. We are responsible for what we have learned about men and women from modern social and biological sciences, as well as from the Holy Spirit. Thomas Aquinas was wise in many things, but even he was a product of his times. In the *Summa Theologiae* we read that "since it is not possible in the female sex to signify eminence of degree, for a woman is in the state of subjection, it follows that she cannot receive the sacrament of Order." What is more, woman's subjection is not due to social conditions. Addressing the question of whether slavery is an impediment to ordination, Thomas wrote in the *Summa* that "sacramental signs signify by reason of their natural likeness. Now a woman is a subject by her nature, whereas a slave is not." Aquinas also believed that "in women there is not sufficient strength of mind to resist concupiscence." One would certainly have doubts about ordaining a creature of such limited endowment.

We cannot judge Thomas Aquinas. But we know better. We know that women are not by nature inferior to men (*see* John Paul II's 1988 apostolic letter, *Mulieris dignitatem*). We know that a woman is no more in a state of subjection by


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her nature than is a man. Aquinas's objections can no longer be cited as reasons to refuse ordination to women. Nor can any other reasons that imply inferiority. To do so would stand in contradiction to what we now understand of the good news of Christ.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Doctrine takes up this challenge in its observations on the Catholic Theological Society of America document, "Tradition and the Ordination of Women." These observations emphasize that the magisterium's rejection of the appeal to female inferiority means that "other factors" should be stressed. What are these other factors? Are they sufficient to safeguard the tradition of the all-male priesthood without endangering the transmission of the Tradition?

The iconic nature of the priesthood is primary among those reasons, as *Inter insigniores* also points out:

> "Sacramental signs," says Saint Thomas, "represent what they signify by natural resemblance." The same natural resemblance is required for persons as for things: when Christ's role in the Eucharist is to be expressed sacramentally, there would not be this "natural resemblance" which must exist between Christ and his minister if the role of Christ were not taken by a man: in such a case it would be difficult to see in the minister the image of Christ. For Christ himself was and remains a man.

This is a confusing passage. Is *Inter insigniores* saying that having women at the altar would be the equivalent of using pizza instead of bread, or Coke instead of wine? Are we being told that the sign-value would be defective because women are of a fundamentally different nature than men, and therefore of Christ? Are we to understand that a woman cannot resemble Christ sufficiently for the faithful to see Christ in her, for her to become a sacrament of Christ? Surely that is not what is being suggested. I say *surely*, because any denial of the power of Christ through his passion, death, and Resurrection to transform a believer into his image is irreconcilable with the Tradition. What would be the reaction if one said that a particular race or nationality could not adequately image Christ? And yet in another age and among certain groups, this too would have been acceptable. The sacramentality of the priesthood cannot demand a male presence in the same way that the celebration of the Eucharist requires the elements of bread and wine. Christ is the destination and ultimate identity of each human being, and all are called to be remade in his image. Thus women are not called to be lesser images of Christ than are men.

But what about Mary? Pope John Paul II, in *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, writes:

> the fact that the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the church, received neither the mission proper to the Apostles nor the ministerial priesthood clearly shows that the nonadmission of women to priestly ordination cannot mean that women are of lesser dignity, nor can it be construed as discrimination against them. Rather, it is to be seen as the faithful observance of a plan to be ascribed to the wisdom of the Lord of the universe.

Again, the argument is confusing. If Mary's role was not to be a priest, does that mean that no women are ever called to be priests? Was Mary not called to be a priest because she was a woman? Or was Mary not called to be a priest because she had another call? Some are called to be prophets, some teachers, some evangelists, some healers, some priests. And one amazing woman was called to be the mother of the Savior. No, if Mary was not ordained, it was because she received a more important call, not because she was a woman.

The constant Tradition of the church is that all, men and women alike, have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But out of God's great love, the Word became flesh, taking on everything about our human condition, born of a woman *inter faeces et urinam* (to borrow Augustine's expression)—like us in all things but sin. We are all, women and men, through our participation in Christ's death and Resurrection in the Eucharistic mystery, which unites all the sacraments, and in the mystery of our everyday lives, called to "be conformed to the image of [God's] Son" (Romans 8:29). We are all "being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor. 3:18). In the words of *Lumen gentium* (7), "All the members [of the body of Christ] must be formed in his likeness, until Christ is formed in them (*see* Gal. 4:19). For this reason we, who have been made like to him, who have died with him and risen with him, are taken up into the mysteries of his life, until we reign together with him...."

In the call to holiness, that is, the call to represent Christ in the world, the church has not traditionally held women to a lower standard than men—on the contrary. Nevertheless, whether or not the intention is there, the all-male priesthood and the arguments proposed in its favor do suggest that women are a lesser image of Christ than men.

"What do I tell my daughters?" I hear a parish leader ask when the topic of ordination comes up. And I imagine Jesus responding, "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea" (Mark 9:42).

Does it matter whether or not women were at the Last Supper, or whether their role in early Christianity included priesthood? The questions are important, but for the discussion of ordination in today's church they cannot be decisive. For the restriction of the priesthood to men is primarily a negative tradition, based on an omission, not on Jesus' unambiguous instruction. It is also a subsidiary tradition, not at the heart of the gospel mystery. Finally, considering what we know today about human beings and about the gospel, it is a tradition that has become a stumbling block to Christ's little ones, a scandal to the world, and a detriment to the handing on of the church's constant Tradition. □



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*Richard Alleva*

# RENOVATIONS

*'Psycho,' 'You've Got Mail' & 'Prince of Egypt'*

Gus Van Sant has not only filmed Joseph Stefano's script of Hitchcock's *Psycho* without rewriting it, he's reproduced nearly all of the staging as well. Nearly, because what may be most interesting to viewers who know the original well is the way Van Sant has sneaked in minute differences within several shots and scenes, mischievously tweaking our memories of the 1960 classic without changing the story.

For example, in the famous opening scene, Hitchcock's camera floated through the window of a hotel room to discover Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) in a white bra and half-slip watching her lover put on his clothes after their lunch-hour tryst. I think the sight of Leigh in dishabille jump-started the puberty of many a pre-adolescent boy like myself, but Van Sant's camera treats his Marion, Anne Heche, like the most gallant of peeping toms by staying pretty much above her collarbone. Her lover, however, is displayed in full dorsal nudity. A gift to female and gay audience members? In any event, we can sense the director winking at us.

Some of these innovations don't work so well: as the detective Arbogast is slashed to death, Van Sant inserts some nearly subliminal shots of a ghostly nude woman and an equally ghostly winding road. Are these the private eye's last thoughts before death? But they mean nothing to us, since we haven't been privy to Arbogast's private life.

Such details are strictly for connoisseurs of the old *Psycho*. What will strike the rest of the audience is the difference the new cast makes, and it's precisely here that we encounter the real superiorities and inferiorities of this remake.

The good news: Julianne Moore makes Marion's sister gutsy, attractive, and infinitely preferable to the drab Vera Miles of 1960. As Marion's lover, Viggo Mortensen is not at his best here but his virile surliness has more to offer than anything the Arrow-shirt-model-posing-as-an-actor John Gavin could provide. Simon Oakland, the original psychiatrist, made the final summarizing speech sound so glib that the movie suddenly lurched into satire. The new shrink, Robert Forster, takes it slowly and ploddingly and makes you feel that the doctor himself is rather surprised by his own conclusions. Thus, the speech comes out fresh.

The bad news: Bill Macy, fine actor though he is and certainly competent here, does not radiate the assurance Martin Balsam employed as the detective to lull the audience into thinking that this man will put everything to rights, a lull that is shockingly exploded in the second murder scene. Macy, with his endearing Howdy Doody face (well-used in *Pleasantville*), has Potential Victim written all over him.

Mixed news: Anne Heche has neither Janet Leigh's wonderful body nor her way of making Marion so maternal that she fails to heed the strain of madness within Norman's pathos. But Heche has something that almost compensates: a pertness, an elfin wit that is interesting here but would be better employed in a screwball comedy, if only screwball comedies were made any more.

Crucially, Vince Vaughn replaces Anthony Perkins's gangliness with thick-necked bluffness and a convincing mask of All-American normality. In a way, this makes the new Norman even more frightening than Perkins's, as if one of the Beach Boys had morphed into Charles Manson. But, let's face it, though Vaughn is excellent, Perkins was beyond excellence: he made neurosis mythic and added an unusual and unusually appealing monster to the American Gothic landscape.

Joseph Stefano's screenplay (from Robert Bloch's novel) remains a model of concision in its plotting and a repository of sinister vibrations in its dialogues. And, since the script hasn't been altered, here is a 1990s adult film without the F word. Bernard Herrmann's score, now Wagnerized by Danny Elfman, is still like hearing the action accompanied by lightning. Not lightning as the prelude to thunder but as the deadly force already zigging through your body.

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*You've Got Mail* is based on Ernst Lubitsch's heartwarming yet candid 1940 movie, *The Shop around the Corner*, one of the few Hollywood films that really captures the European flavor of their settings, in this case the economically depressed Budapest of the early thirties. The script by Phoebe and Nora Ephron (which Nora directed) has used only one of the strands of the original plot (a young man and woman using pen names court each other by mail—here e-mail—not realizing they already know and loathe each other), and has relocated it to Rudy Giuliani's new, tourist-friendly, family-friendly New York City: street fairs for children, all bars are called Starbucks, and not a beggar or hooker in sight. The movie's characters suit this dream city. The tycoon-hero (Tom Hanks), whose Borders-type super bookstore threatens to drive the heroine's children's bookstore out of business, is basically a nice guy even before he falls in love. (He's happy to chaperone his little half-brother and niece on weekend excursions.) And Meg Ryan is never so cute as when she's sassing the capitalist who loves her. You know these two are made for each other but you have to wait two-and-a-quarter hours for them to find out.

The Ephrons have invented so much for their remake that they should feel justified in regarding comparisons as odious. Yet one overriding comparison kept infiltrating my odious mind: Lubitsch's film was full of pain and fear of poverty, and these emotions somehow made the comedy funnier and the final triumph of love sweeter. In the new movie, nothing is as stake, nothing hurts, nothing matters. Yes, Meg wants to save her little enterprise from rich wolves, but she is so trim, so modestly *soignée*, so unremittingly nice that even President Clinton couldn't detect her pain, much less feel it. (When Ryan works her facial muscles trying to achieve intensity, the audience may feel quite another kind of pain.) She's a smart cookie who will get another job, and all her employees are either young enough to survive or old enough to retire on sound investments. And it's not as if Hanks is opening a strip joint in Ryan's tidy little neighborhood. As Ephron is honest enough to show, the kids who once went to Ryan's store now ensconce themselves in aisles of the superstore, happily reading or playing board games—the same sight that greets me every time I visit Borders or Barnes and Noble.

Tom Hanks is, expectedly, deft and pleasing, yet I kept wishing that Bill Murray had been cast to give the role some real insolence, some edge, so that the hero's emotional warming might be made more dramatic. Lubitsch's writer, Samson Raphaelson, structured his script so that the prickly lovers come together at Christmas, the season of good will. The Ephrons let their plot shuffle on into springtime, the season of rebirth. This, too, should be appropriate, but since Hanks has been making puppy-dog eyes at Ryan for over half the movie while she keeps snapping, "Sorry, gotta go now," the audience may feel less rebirth than relief at the final embrace. *You've Got Mail* is bright, too bright, funny, self-congratulatory in its funniness, sharp, and so hip that the sharpness goes to work on your teeth.

*Prince of Egypt* is just as much an animation remake of Cecil B. DeMille's 1956 *The Ten Commandments* as it is a retelling of the biblical story.

I was prepared to hate this movie. No, I wanted to hate it, because a cartoon version of such a stern, monumental, founding event struck me as not just a bad idea but a cultural affront. So I was storing up venomous remarks even before I entered the theater.

Alas, I'm unable to use them. To be sure, the film is sometimes egregious. The boy Moses and his adoptive brother, Rameses, hot rod in their chariots as if they were auditioning for a Roger Corman biker movie (*The Wild Pharaohs*?). Zipporah is turned into a swashbuckling tomboy along the lines of Esmeralda in Disney's *Hunchback*, as if biblical women were not already strong enough to please feminists. And the Stephen Schwartz score is, by and large, dreadful.

Yet the film moved me. The animators and scriptwriters have not turned the story into a relativistic, multicultural, chicken-soup-for-the-soul smarmy mess. No, they have used the plot device lifted from DeMille—the early brotherhood of Rameses and Moses turning into epic enmity—to present a concept to children that is by now almost alien to our culture, though it is one of the central themes of the Bible: the persistence of an evil so deep that it visits itself upon the young and innocent. Moses, at first as proud to be a prince of Egypt as his brother, breaks with his past when he learns of the slaughter of the innocents from which he was saved. But Rameses, the upholder of tradition, sinks into the culture of death that has spawned him. By being a dutiful heir, he dooms his own heir.

This is epitomized in one shot. Moses has gone to petition Pharaoh in a temple where the ruler is accompanied by his little son. Moses stands on one side of a wall painting which depicts the drowning of the Hebrew babies while Pharaoh stands opposite him. Between the two men and below the painting stands the firstborn Egyptian prince. The pictures of the falling, drowning babies seem to tumble onto the head of the real child, seem to make him the inheritor of their destruction. It is an image of doom unmatched in any other children's movie.

Again and again, the animators and writers refuse to pull punches, refuse to make the biblical story saccharine. The fire of the burning bush leaps forth in fury when Moses pleads his ineptitude as a messenger of God. The divine voice thunders, "Who hath made man's mouth?...have not I, the Lord?" For a moment, God is scary. Is this the first time in a children's movie that God has been made scary? And is the Passover scene—eerily presenting a mist that follows Egyptian children into their houses to kill them—the first expressly meant to show children that the ways of God can be not only mysterious but downright stomach-churning?

The people at Dreamworks have done the right thing, though they may be punished at the box office. The Bible must not be rendered innocuous, even when it's adapted for kids. Especially not then. □



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*Celia Wren*

# ATTITUDE

*'Electra' & 'Wit'*

The new Broadway Electra is a heroine with an attitude. Mourning for her father, King Agamemnon of Mycenae, years after her mother Clytemnestra killed him, the eponymous heroine of the Sophocles tragedy *Electra* is obstinate, opinionated, and more than a little smug. "I will never cease to call out my pain and my complaint!" she wails in this electrically tense production, which David Leveaux has directed from Irish playwright Frank McGuinness's newly adapted script.

Camping outside the palace, where Clytemnestra is living with a lover, Electra wallows in grief so ostentatious it makes sackcloth and ashes look like confetti. Playing the title role, the elfin Zoë Wanamaker mopes around in a brown coat that must be a man's extra-large (it's her father's, no doubt) and wipes her nose with a cuff so long it obscures her hand. She throws herself full-length on a stylized altar and then pitches herself off it to roll on the ground in utter despair. The actress's short spiky hair appears to be balding in places, and when she laments, her voice sometimes rasps as if she were at death's door.

Which, in a sense, she is—the creepily stark set (designed by Johan Engels) consists of a gray brick wall enclosing a gigantic gray sheet-metal door that is left partially ajar so people can slip in and out to murder each other. Downstage, a dingy white plank, suggesting both an altar and a hospital bed, and a few broken chairs rest on the dirt that covers the entire stage surface.

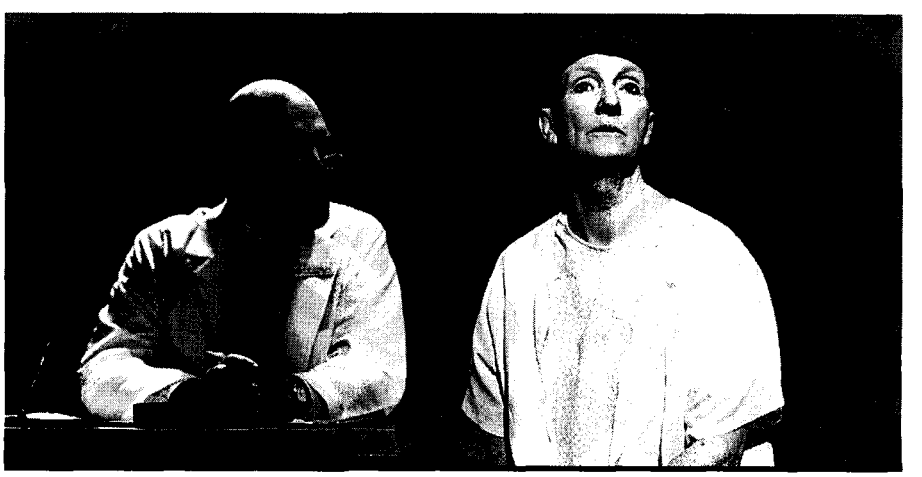
The spot looks devastated, and it is not surprising to read, in the program, director Leveaux's note comparing the play's "cycle of violence" to the war in the Balkans. And certainly the deliberately guarded bitterness of Electra and her long-lost brother Orestes (Michael Cumpsty), and their refusal to consider their mother's point of view (Clytemnestra killed her husband because he had sacrificed their daughter Iphigenia to the gods), seem eerily similar to the resentments described in dispatches from Bosnia and elsewhere.

But the play's near-unwavering focus on its heroine—from the unnerving offstage wail that heralds her first appearance to her final vindication—suggests a less literal meaning for the desolation at Mycenae. Just as the play's drab color scheme appears, after her entrance, to echo the brown of her coat, so the blight on her family and their dependents begins to seem an extension of her mood. Everyone she meets falls under her spell—even the Chorus of Mycenae (played as a knowing peasant woman in a headscarf by actress Pat Carroll) is fascinated by her. Similarly swayed by Wanamaker's charisma, the audience can almost see Electra giving the cycle of violence a helpful little push.

The emphasis on personality comes as a surprise, because classic tragedy more often seems impersonal; governed by *attitude* in its traditional sense (an arrangement or posture) rather than its slangy modern sense (a sort of egoistic crankiness). Individuals in tragedy often fade into the stately pattern of life, death, and fate. "The tragic writers believed easily in greatness just as we believe easily in meanness," the literary critic Joseph Wood Krutch wrote, describing the solemnly beautiful tragic order. But if we can spot greatness in *Electra*—in the dignity of Claire Bloom, dressed in scarlet as the regal, doomed Clytemnestra, for example—we can see the meanness as well.

Such dual vision can be uncomfortable, even agonizing, as it is in another strikingly literary play that has taken New York by storm. The gorgeously intellectual *Wit*, elementary-school teacher Margaret Edson's remarkable first play, centers around a brilliant professor of English literature who is hospitalized with advanced ovarian cancer. As research-oriented oncologists swoop down to study her, Vivian Bearing, Ph.D. (played with well-calibrated shrewdness and occasional vulnerability by Kathleen Chalfant, a red baseball cap on her bald head), reflects on her own field of study, the poetry of John Donne. With humor, irony, and a certain exhilaration, the play draws out contrasts and parallels between two kinds of knowledge—medical and literary—and two ways of approaching life—via thought and via sympathy. The taut off-Broadway production, which has been so successful it recently moved to a larger theater, is directed by Derek Anson Jones.

Bearing, who once reveled in the cerebral games (the "wit") of Donne's *Holy*





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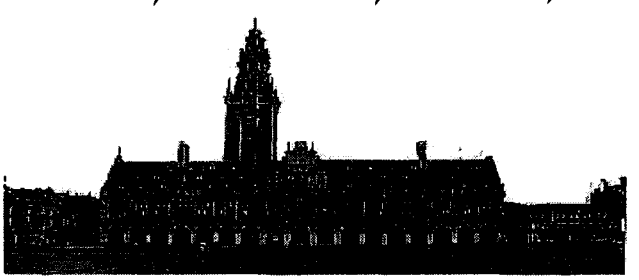

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*Sonnets*, finds that language can no longer shield her from the terrifying truths of existence. Death, a word she once parsed along with a verse's syntax, starts to overwhelm her as it becomes physical, a matter of tubes and fluids. (In the current production, scenic designer Myung Hee Cho exploits the average viewer's hospital phobia with sweeping synthetic curtain-partitions that change color, from stark white to sickly green, with the lighting.) Not that she succumbs without mustering an attitude: "I would prefer that a play about me be cast in the mythic-heroic-pastoral mode," she sniffs in one of many direct remarks to the audience.

But, trained as she is in intellectual rigors, the dying professor can still detect the pattern behind the particulars. She can understand the distracted manner of the young medical fellow (the boyishly officious Alec Phoenix) who views her as a collection of cells, rather than a person. And she can even describe her own life's narrative arc: "I am becoming proficient at suffering," she observes—a remark Electra might echo.

*Wit* is full of suffering, but, to its credit, nearly devoid of sentimentality. Juggling ideas about knowledge and authority, the rift between the sciences and humanities, the power of words, and other weighty matters, it often resembles a poem by Donne. As in Donne, the emotion is in the thought. "A thought to Donne was an experience," T. S. Eliot wrote in his seminal essay "The Metaphysical Poets," in which he posited that metaphysical poets, like Donne, were among the last English writers able to "feel their thought as immediately as the odor of a rose." After them, Eliot believed, a "dissociation of sensibility" set into literature, driving a wedge between thought and feeling.

It is because our sensibility is still dissociated that productions like *Electra* and *Wit* shock. Because we approach thought and feeling as if they were oil and water, we are surprised when the word *attitude* means two things at once, when anguish suffuses a drama of ideas, or when petulance rages from the elegant frame of a Greek tragedy. □



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# Another tradition

**Kaddish**
*Leon Wieseltier*
*Alfred A. Knopf, $27.50, 588 pp.*

**Dennis O'Brien**

On March 24, 1996 (Nisan 5, 5756), Leon Wieseltier's father died. "One of the most dreaded eventualities in a man's life has overtaken me," he writes, "and what do I do. I plunge into books! I can see that this is bizarre. It is also Jewish. Anyway, it is what I know how to do." During the succeeding year, the son steadfastly participated in the traditional mourner's *kaddish* owed to a father. But just how *traditional* is *kaddish* ? And what does all this ritual amount to after all?

Wieseltier, the literary editor of the *New Republic*, "plunges into books" to answer these questions. The *kaddish* tradition, he discovers, is late, hardly biblical. What does it mean? According to the extensive, expansive, exhausting commentary of centuries of rabbis, *kaddish* "acquits" the soul of the father through the action of the son, delivering the father from the pains of Gehenna (hell) to various levels of heavenly reward. (The role of mothers and daughters is only glanced at in the rabbinical literature.) Wieseltier: " Do I really believe these stories about the souls of the dead descending and ascending, this pornography of reward and punishment?"

*Kaddish* is a lengthy—588-pages worth—meditation on death and its meaning for the living. It is also extraordinary. The bulk of the text consists of Wieseltier's frantic search for rabbinical enlightenment. (In my thesaurus, "frantic" is paired with "excited," "transported," "desperate," "passionate," "ecstatic," "furious"; "search" is paired with "rummage." One might also have described the text as "ecstatic rummage.") Starting with Nahmanides, "the religious genius of Spanish Jewry in the thirteenth century," Wieseltier calls up an uncountable assemblage of rabbis from Akiva (who seems to be the source of the *kaddish* custom) through Maimonides, Rashi, Joseph Karo, Elaezar ben Judah of Worms—"the influential pietist and jurist of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries" known as "the Perfumer"—and on and on. Threaded through Wieseltier's mustering and quarreling with the rabbis, there are personal comments about the ups and downs of going to *shul* day after day, feelings generated by the ritual, the seasons of the year in Washington, D.C., the sadness of his mother whose parents were killed by the Nazis, so never properly interred or recollected in the customary prayers. Rather like Hammarskjold's *Markings*—for all its bulk, *Kaddish* is also a great work of and for meditation—Wieseltier rises above his scholastic *excursus* to offer pungent apothegms: "Who needs a realist in a prayer shawl? There is nothing less edifying than a godly man who knows the score."

But in the end Wieseltier is some sort of "realist," he really cannot "believe" the godly stories of the rabbis. Why, then, this determination to say *kaddish* ? He sums it up in a profound paradox: "I believe because I know that I will die; I do not believe because I know that I will die: both propositions have sense, have dignity. Thoughts in a downpour...on the way to *shul*." One might say that Wieseltier's book is in every way a "downpour." There is the downpour of death itself, the drowning despair of the common lot; there is the downpour of humanity's prayers, prophecies, and musings about death—among which the rabbinical tradition is among the most significant. There is the downpour of Wieseltier's commentary, exegesis, meditation, anguish in a very, very long book.

Obviously, Wieseltier's volume is a deep *excursus* into Jewish thought; does it have any special relevance to Catholic readers? Many, but I would cite two which struck this reader in particular. Wieseltier is deeply Jewish in turning to the rabbis. Judaism is, when all is said and done, "rabbinical Judaism," for it is the rabbis who codified, preserved, and forwarded the experience of ancient Israel. It is worth comparing "rabbinical Judaism" with what seems to be present-

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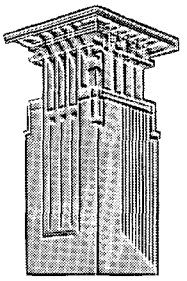

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day "pontifical Catholicism." Wieseltier's book is lengthy in part because the rabbis do not agree. While there is always deference to learned predecessors, there is often an edge of difference and complexity. Wieseltier on a commentary by Rabbi Moellin ( sixteenth century) on the issue of whether locals or strangers have preference in saying *kaddish* : "[I]n this single text, I have been taught to appreciate inclusiveness for reasons of principle, exclusiveness for reasons of principle, inclusiveness for practical reasons, exclusiveness for practical reasons. Such is the rabbinical imagination. It must picture all the eventualities. To know the right answer, it must know the world." Wieseltier's commentary on tradition is an implicit critique of any tradition of pontifical certainty: "What is tradition without confusion? But I don't mind confusion. It is an existential excess, a measure of vitality. A tradition that is completely transparent, is a tradition that is over."

As noted, Wieseltier remains a "realist" when it comes to any of the "supernatural" stories which might justify *kaddish*. *Kaddish* is *not* a prayer for the soul of the dead as in the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory. Rather, the *fact* that a son performs *kaddish* "acquits" the father's soul because the son's piety has been "caused" by the good instruction of the father. A son's *kaddish* is a father's good deed. Wieseltier regards the acquittal scenario as a "metaphysical absurdity." *Kaddish* has no transcendental effect, but it does signal loyalty to family and Jewish history; the strange stories of that history must, therefore, be encountered with some appreciation. "Why strain the mind, when you can strain the imagination."

"Demythologizing" the rabbinical stories often seems necessary and appropriate, but just how far can such a divergence from the plain text be taken? Wieseltier asks himself that question: "There is no point taking shelter in the multiplicity of meanings. For among the many meanings of these words is their literal meaning. What to do about the plain sense of the prayers?" In Catholic thought there is the principle, *lex orandi, lex credendi*: as we pray, so do we believe.



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Faith is the child of prayer, not the other way round as is often supposed. I remain uneasy, then, with saying *kaddish* with such determination and yet having no belief however vague and mysterious linking the actual living and the actual dead. In the Christian Easter story, whatever else Resurrection may mean, it would be empty if it meant nothing to the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

*Kaddish* has been hailed by critics and rightly so. I did discover on the Internet a disgruntled reader: "This is a self-indulgent, long-winded waste of time. The man's father died: I am sorry for him. But does the death of a family member excuse any kind of self-indulgent, pseudo-philosophical nonsense?" *Kaddish* is a very long, ruminative, digressive work. Self-indulgent? Claudius chides Hamlet: "Tis sweet and commendable on your nature, Hamlet,/To give these mourning duties to your father,/But you must know that your father lost a father,/That father lost, lost his.../But to persevere/In obstinate condolement is a course/Of impious stubbornness." Though *kaddish* for the individual mourner is strictly limited to a year, our religious traditions do not heed Claudius's common sense, but go on, and on, as in this magnificent meditation, puzzling and fretting and praying, seeking, like Hamlet, a moral story for death. Wieseltier: "What death really says is: *think*." □

**Dennis O'Brien** *is president emeritus of the University of Rochester. His most recent book is* All the Half-Truths about Higher Education *(University of Chicago).*

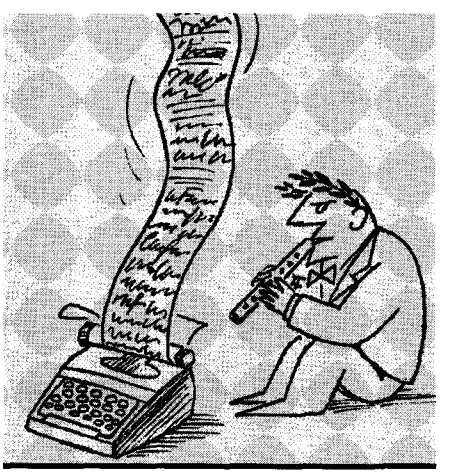
# EAST MEETS WEST

**Beyond the Darkness**
**A Biography of Bede Griffiths**
***Shirley Du Boulay***
*Doubleday, $24.95, 308 pp.*

**David Toolan**

At age seventy, Dom Bede Griffiths was able to say, "I always feel about twenty-one, just beginning to explore life and always finding new things." Even after suffering a series of strokes in 1990 and vowing never again to leave Shantivanam ("forest of peace"), his ashram in South India, he soon broke that promise and took off on two years of round-the-world speaking tours, visiting Canada, the United States, England, Germany, Austria, Italy, Australia, and Singapore. "My message," he said, "was always to transcend our divisions—religious, social, psychological, linguistic—the fragmented state of humanity—and recover the wholeness." The religions of the world, he felt, complement each other. "I have to be a Hindu, a Buddhist, a Jain, a Parsee, a Sikh, a Muslim, and a Jew, as well as a Christian," wrote Bede in *Return to the Center* (1976), "if I am to know the Truth and find the point of reconciliation in all religion."

The older he got, the more outspoken he became. In letters to the London *Tablet* he criticized the "inordinate claims" of the papacy, holding that there could be no hope of Christian reunion "until the Roman church publicly acknowledges its past errors and admits that it does not have the answers to all the difficult problems of sexual morality and other matters which trouble humanity today." He favored a married clergy, and regarded the church's difficulty in conceiving God as mother as one of Christianity's greatest defects, writing in the *Tablet*: "Perhaps it is only when we have learned to recognize God as mother that woman will find her rightful place in the church."



Before picking up Shirley Du Boulay's new biography of Dom Bede, I had been roughly familiar with his story—born Alan Griffiths in 1906, raised in the Hampshire countryside, an incorrigible romantic and Oxford "aesthete," a longtime friend of C.S. Lewis, convert to Catholicism and monk of Prinknash Abbey in Gloucestershire, and finally pioneer of interreligious dialogue in India. What was new to me was the complete picture of Bede's final years—the most revealing and moving part of Du Boulay's book.

At age eighty-four, just two years before his death in May 1993, Bede still couldn't contain himself; he was bursting with energy and new plans for a worldwide network of lay contemplatives. His strokes, he believed, had opened up the "other half of my soul"—the intuitive, feminine, and unconscious dimension. Ever since he had left his monastery in England in 1955, he had been looking for this other side of himself in India. And now, after thirty-five years there, his mind had been "blown," as he put it, by an experience of the feminine in all its forms: as the Mother of God, as Earth Mother, as Black Madonna manifest in rocks and caves, in all nature and in his own mother and the Hindu concept of Shakti, the feminine aspect of divine energy. When Bede surrendered to this dark energy—a kind of death like Christ's on the cross—he experienced overwhelming love, a love that he felt took him beyond the rational mind to the depths of the divine mystery. The day after he had this experience on February 25, 1990, he sprang out of bed and for the first time in months began to walk without a cane. Thereafter, this very reserved Englishman took to hugging people.

For all too many Westerners, Bede often observed, Christianity had become



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a formal, dogmatic, moralistic religion that had the effect of preventing interior growth. These vagrant souls had been coming to see him by the thousands since the early 1970s, fascinated by the idea of a Benedictine monk living like a barefoot Hindu holy man. "Love just poured out of him," visitors would remark. "He doesn't advise or give directions," reported another, "he just walks with you, follows you with an understanding heart and encourages you."

In 1955, at age forty-nine, Bede had left England to establish a Christian contemplative center in India. His aim was not to convert anyone but to provide a meeting place between Hindus and Christians at the deepest level. "I am so tired of the childish pretense," he would write to a friend in the midseventies, "that Christianity is the only true religion and must be shown to be superior to others." "A Christian ashram," he wrote, "must be a place where a meeting can take place in 'the cave of the heart' between the Christian experience of God through faith in Jesus Christ and the Hindu experience of 'Brahman,' the One 'without a second,' the Ground of all creation and the 'Atman,' the Spirit, dwelling in the heart of every man." This meeting, he insisted, has to take place "in the depth of the contemplative experience, which is only possible in a life dedicated to the search for God, the quest for the Absolute, that has always been the goal of monastic life." The great mistake of missionaries, he thought, was to imagine they could preach the gospel and receive nothing themselves from Hindu culture.

Du Boulay is unsure of Bede's intellectual contribution to interfaith dialogue. She has reason to be. If I understand him, Bede went beyond Vatican II's inclusivism—the idea, as in Karl Rahner's "anonymous Christianity," that Christianity embraces the truth of all the world's religions. Such an approach remains imperialistic; it implicitly reduces the otherness of other religions to a version of one's own tradition. This kind of inclusivism gives the impression that orthodoxy must be repressive, that by its very nature any Christian truth claim will assault the integrity of other religions.

In contrast, Bede's approach to the interfaith dialogue tried to be pluralistic. But like many other contemporary pluralists, the key to his reconciliation of opposites lay in assuming that all religions point to the same ultimate truth. The trouble comes as soon as one specifies what that single truth is. For many pluralists, it sounds like modern Western liberalism. For Bede it came across sounding like the monism of Advaita Vedanta. "All meditation," he wrote, "should lead into silence, into the world of 'non-duality,' when all differences—and conflicts—in this world are transcended—not that they are simply annulled, but that they are taken up into a deeper unity of being in which all conflicts are resolved—rather like colors being absorbed into pure white light, which contains all the colors but resolves their differences." What's the problem here? Frankly, this merely exchanges the imperialism of Western metaphysics for an imperialism of Eastern metaphysics. The distinctive differences of diverse religions are swallowed up in a bland transcendental unity. On these terms, figures like the prophets Amos and Hosea would be barred from ecumenical conferences as being entirely too noisy and ill-tempered. In short, "open-minded" Christians could only enter the interfaith dialogue if they left some of their basic commitments at the door.

Bede Griffiths may have been a saint. He seems to have gotten an awful lot very right in practice. But when it came to understanding how Christianity is to relate to the other great faiths of the planet, he and we have more figuring to do. □

**David Toolan, S.J.,** *is an associate editor of* America *magazine.*

# THE QUEST FOR MORE

**The Life of Thomas More**
*Peter Ackroyd*
*Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, $30, 447 pp.*

**Marcia L. Colish**

Given the available biographies of Thomas More (1478–1535), why another one? Peter Ackroyd has two good reasons, one acknowledged and the other unstated. It was only in 1990 that the last volume in the critical edition of More's works was published. Thus, only biographers in the 1990s can exploit these materials exhaustively. Ackroyd does so, with telling effect. Also, More has always been controversial. From the sixteenth century onward, relatives and later coreligionists have drawn a hagiographical picture of More, countered by the view of him as a bloodthirsty heresy-hunter inspired by Protestant martyrologists, with or without retroactive head-shrinking. Students of Renaissance literature and humanism see him as an erudite, eloquent, elegant wit and scholar, an engaged and engaging family man and man of letters, while political historians typically treat him as a conscientious but bland facilitator, less an idea man or mover and shaker than Cardinal Wolsey or Thomas Cromwell, his predecessor and successor as lord chancellor. While Ackroyd does not identify interpretations he opposes, he does take a personal stand, and offers a generally persuasive reading of More.

Ackroyd's bibliography shows that he has done his homework well; but his scholarship has flaws. He thinks Saint Augustine was a lawyer before his conversion, not a professional rhetorician, and describes Justinian's *corpus* as a compendium of canon, not civil, law. He assumes, incorrectly, that the thirteenth-century logician Petrus Hispalensis was taught at Oxford in More's student days; actually, Oxford masters used the *Logica Oxoniensis*. More than a dozen misspelled authors' names and garbled titles mar his notes and bibliography.



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These glitches, however, are decisively offset by the evocative and richly textured picture Ackroyd paints of English life in More's day. The sights, sounds, and even smells of More's London emerge vividly. Recently, scholarship has revised our understanding of English religious life on the eve of the Reformation and Ackroyd accepts its findings, depicting a religious culture whose ritual and color were pervasive and deeply satisfying. He argues that More feared that this familiar and sustaining environment would be annihilated by the break with Rome. The legal culture that formed More was even more central in shaping his conviction that order and hierarchy were essential and that any attack on these principles would destroy the social fabric. Another key element in More's intellectual makeup, for Ackroyd, was rhetoric and role-playing. Thus, More's anti-Lutheran tracts are less an index of his personal devotional agenda or manifestations of neurotic fixations than literary exercises in which More invoked the generic conventions and vocabulary of contemporary polemic, with an eye to the sensibilities of the audiences he addressed. In contrast with the themes stressed in such works, More's own spirituality centered on devotion to and imitation of the Man of Sorrows.

In recounting the crisis leading to More's execution, Ackroyd agrees that Henry VIII's resolution of the "king's great matter" was triggered by his desire that his child by Anne Boleyn be born legitimate. Ackroyd soft-pedals Henry's late-blooming religious scruples and Queen Catherine's age, which foreclosed the possibility of a male heir by her. Other biographers have exposed Henry's double game in seeking a papal dispensation in order to marry Anne, whose sister had been his mistress, while simultaneously claiming that the papal dispensation that permitted him to marry his brother's widow could not override the church's consanguinity rule.

If Henry's deviousness is unacknowledged by Ackroyd, it was certainly known to More, who made it clear to Henry in private that he could not countenance the annulment of the king's marriage to Catherine. A major unresolved question is why, knowing More's position, Henry appointed him lord chancellor, and why More accepted, knowing that the exercise of that office was likely to destroy him. No consensus exists on this question. Ackroyd thinks that Henry believed More could be won over, and that More accepted because his whole career was a preparation for the chancellorship and because commitment to public service, come what may, was so ingrained in his character that he could not refuse. Ackroyd's Henry is more sanguine and less disingenuous than that of other biographers; his More is more naive about his ability to defend his queen and church.

Ackroyd also revises the political historians' estimate of More. His More emerges as an activist, an effective leader, efficient and just in discharging his duties. More receives highest marks as a diplomat and as a judge in the Court of Chancery. Prosecution of heresy was part of this job, as it was before and after


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More. In Ackroyd's view, More was not motivated by a fanatic enjoyment of the heretics' sufferings; his concern was to investigate and uproot the networks through which heterodox literature was imported and distributed. As to the charge that More succumbed to double-think in denying the heretics' right of conscience while demanding the same right for himself, Ackroyd is surely correct in observing that More held himself just as accountable to the law as anyone else. He resigned the chancellorship to avoid opposing king and Parliament openly. And, when the government decided that More's noncompliance as a private citizen was a public-relations problem, he did not claim exemption from the Court of Star Chamber or from the verdict it handed down. As for More the Christian, Ackroyd depicts him with admiration. His More is a Christian humanist, committed to evangelical piety and private asceticism, an active life of charity to the unfortunate, and to public service as his worldly calling.

This is not to say that Ackroyd has resolved all the ambiguities surrounding the actions and convictions of this complex and subtle personality. To his very considerable credit, he avoids reductionistic theorizing of any kind. Ackroyd succeeds in bringing to life, without canonizing, demonizing, or psychopathologizing, a man for whom paradox was not just a Renaissance taste but a condition of his inner universe, no less than of the external universe—theological and political—that he inhabited. In his last chapter, Ackroyd quotes More's words at the scaffold: "I die the king's good servant, but God's first." He might equally have quoted, as the book's subtext, More's motto: "Be ye wise as serpents; be ye innocent as doves." □

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# AN EYE FOR DETAIL

**The Higher Jazz**
***Edmund Wilson***
***edited by Neale Reinitz***
*University of Iowa Press, $34.95, 239 pp.*

**David Castronovo**

Do we need an unfinished, posthumous novel from a great literary critic and essayist? This one has been brought to life by Neale Reinitz, an emeritus professor of English at Colorado College and an accomplished Wilson enthusiast who found some 207 pages of handwritten draft, dating from 1942, in the Beinecke Library at Yale. Reinitz has made good sense out of the fragment and Wilson's notes, giving the unfinished novel shape, allowing it to live without hiccupping footnotes, supplying it with chapter titles and instructive endnotes—not to mention the present title. The results for the reader are substantial and ultimately satisfying. This is—let's be blunt—no fragment like Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon* or Hemingway's *Islands in the Stream*. But it's a valuable contribution to the American novel of manners—a branch that can always use an addition of quality—and an invaluable book for those who love Wilson's style and his curiosity about the social antagonisms of his time.

The book is a piquant, often sarcastic group portrait of 1920s New Yorkers. The cast includes composers, playwrights, and wits, as well as the old monied crowd who hung out with them in speakeasies, at parties on the East Side, and for weekends at splendid country homes on the Hudson. The protagonist, Fritz Dietrich, is something of a composer himself. A Yalie from a very well-to-do Pittsburgh family, he has easy access to the patrician world with its dissipated reprobates and women in crisp, linen summer dresses. In tracing scenes from Dietrich's life, Wilson is dealing with a kind of shadow self, what he would have been without great literary gifts, mythic labors, and considerable self-knowledge. The oblique autobiographical study presents a frank picture of American status and pleasure-seeking. What is most clear and fine is the solidity of Wilson's descriptions of class indicators—a living room, a man's suit, a rich woman's attitude about fifty dollars. Observations have the precision of social history rather than the fabulousness of a romance like *The Great Gatsby*; and yet this devotion to actuality is not at all like the empty catalogues of fashion and furniture in glamour-sex-money novels. Wilson is here and elsewhere essentially a reporter, but a reporter with total command of the material details and social context. Wilson supplies only the most resonant detail, be it from a burlesque show or a tony musicale.

The twenties—with its excitement, Prohibition drinking, and animated talk—was Wilson's defining decade and



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occasion for some of his best writing. His journal *The Twenties* had a cast of hundreds and the story of a young journalist finding his way. His two masterpieces about the era—*The Shores of Light* and *The American Earthquake*—were exhilarating coverage of books, shows, and daily spectacles around New York. His novel *I Thought of Daisy*, published in 1929, was a recollection about a poetess (Edna Millay), a jazz baby (Daisy), and assorted friends from Wilson's days in the Village and at Princeton. And in 1946 he came out with *Memoirs of Hecate County*, a sweeping novel about class and politics in the twenties and thirties. *The Higher Jazz* is often as vivid as *Daisy*, but not as good as the best section of *Hecate County*. It lacks a gripping central conflict such as the one between the cultivated art critic and a dance-hall girl in *Hecate County*. Wilson never writes a bad sentence, but the new book still does not hum in the full novelistic sense. For someone who retold plots so movingly in critical works like *Axel's Castle* and made the history of socialism into a kind of novel in *To the Finland Station*, Wilson was generally too discursive in his fiction. Situations, yes; tales, rarely.

Fritz Dietrich, like Wilson himself, loves modernism and wants American creators to rival Europeans by combining the discipline of high art—of the Schoenbergs and Picassos and Joyces—with the flavors of popular culture. Thus "the higher jazz." But many of the well-educated, talented young of the era are undone by conventionality and trendiness. The old pull of class pride, leisure, and comfort stalls careers. And those unaffected by the older, overconfident America of Yale's Skull and Bones and literary amateurism—the children of immigrants—are at the mercy of a newly emerging fun culture: the speakeasy, the wisecrack, the smart ad, the tempo of Broadway and Madison Avenue. Wilson's Dietrich is depicted as the composer who knows what is happening to him and his friends, but he has none of his creator's ability to resist. Upper-class absurdity and pathos are brilliantly served up, but Wilson's protagonist merely observes the dispiriting scene. Married to stylish, pleasure-loving Caroline Stokes, Dietrich meets a hilarious collection of people ruined by their self-indulgence. Wilson goes after these types with his well-known eye for waste and irresponsibility, an eye trained by his own earnest father. Repeatedly warned as a boy about "weltering in a Dead Sea of mediocrity," Wilson uses all his wit and critical sense to evoke an enervated world.

In *The Higher Jazz*, Wilson, the man of the twenties, shows us the demons that tempted him throughout his life: snobbery, dissipation, ennui, knowingness. While a disappointment as fictional narrative, these pages memorably crystallize Wilson's own fears and aspirations. The social studies in the book are important additions to Wilson's account of a divided and confused nation. □

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**David Castronovo** *is author, most recently, of* Edmund Wilson Revisited *and editor (with Janet Groth) of* From the Uncollected Edmund Wilson. *He is professor of English at Pace University in New York City.*

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# SOCIAL CATHOLICISM

**Church and Revolution**
**Catholics and the Struggle for Democracy and Social Justice**
*Thomas Bokenkotter*
*Doubleday Image Books, $15, 597 pp.*

**World Christianity and Marxism**
*Denis R. Janz*
*Oxford University Press, $35, 188 pp.*

**John A. Coleman**

This spring an international conference on Catholic social thinking will be held at the Von Hügel Institute in Cambridge, England. The preliminary outline for the conference laments the general lack of attention given to nonofficial Catholic social thinking. Such movements, the conference's organizers argue, "have acted as precursor, challenger, or developer. Yet, particularly in recent times, there has been a shortfall in such thinking, at least in the first world."

"Official" Catholic social teaching almost never falls virginally from the heavens in ahistorical papal pronouncements. Real social movements and circles of thinkers, such as the Munchen-Gladbach group around the Center party in Germany (for *Quadragesimo anno*) or Poland's Solidarity (for *Laborem exercens*) feed into, evoke, and subsequently enact the papal teaching. Behind official Catholic social teaching lies a host of thinkers such as Jacques Maritain, Joseph LeBret, and Barbara Ward. Exhibiting an intellectual rigor the somewhat more pastorally oriented encyclicals often lacked, these philosophers and writers wrestled with problems such as structural unemployment, third-world development, human-rights theory, and new concrete strategies for enacting church-society models of interaction.

My own experience in teaching courses on Catholic social thought for more than twenty years has been that students take to the history and social analysis of such thinkers and movements more readily than they do to the often laboriously written encyclicals and bishops' pastorals. Moreover, students actually read the pastorals and social encyclicals with more zest and insight when they can see, behind these often dense texts, the real policy debates that fuel them. They then can imaginatively transpose the conflicts of earlier periods to their own contemporary struggles.

Thomas Bokenkotter, a church historian at Xavier University in Cincinnati, has written an able, well-researched, and lively history recalling many of the key figures and movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that fed into or inspired official social Catholicism. Many of the usual cast of characters appear in his book: Félicité Robert de Lamennais, Henri Lacordaire, Charles de Montalembert, Luigi Sturzo, Frederick Ozanam, Cardinal Henry Manning, Jacques Maritain, Emmanuel Mounier. Large chunks of the book are devoted to the "official" church's discerning judgment (or knee-jerk biases and self-serving compromises) about the social and moral consequences of the French and industrial revolutions, and the subsequent rise of fascism and communism.

The title of the book suggests a special focus, throughout, on revolution. Yet, except in a vaguely metaphorical way, it is hard to tie several of Bokenkotter's subjects, especially Dorothy Day, Cardinal Manning, and Konrad Adenauer, to any revolution. The subtitle of the book also somewhat misleadingly conflates the distinct Catholic struggles for democracy and social justice for the poor. Many of the "liberal" Catholic thinkers of the nineteenth century, such as Montalembert, Daniel O' Connell, and Lord Acton, in no way nurtured any decided social sense or program to address a festering poverty. For example, Montalembert, thinking no mediation between Catholicism and socialism possible, came close to a *laissez-faire* rejection of any governmental programs for poor relief. "O'Connell and his followers always tended to subordinate economic to political issues and can scarcely be said to have evolved a coherent policy of social reform," Bokenkotter himself writes. "As landlords and landholders, they had little interest in a radical reconstruction of Irish society."

Moreover, many of the most ardent Catholic proponents of social justice for the poor were definitely no friends of democracy. Both Albert de Mun (who was dubbed "the Knight of the Syllabus of Errors") and his close associate René La Tour du Pin were royalists who organized a counterrevolutionary centennial in 1889 and were on the wrong side of the Dreyfus case (as were most Catholics). Indeed, anti-Semitism infected much of social Catholicism in pre-World War I France and Austria.

Bokenkotter might have analyzed how Catholic thinking on democracy and so-

*"This time around, I want* **nothing** *to do with politics!"*



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cial justice for the poor, so frequently separated in the nineteenth century, actually came together in the twentieth. But he is a traditional historian who hews closely to straightforward narratives more than to any deeper social analysis; to the recounting of lives and thought more than to an assessment of social forces. This is not a book of social history or a broader evocation of shifting *mentalités*. What Bokenkotter does, however, he does well. He gives us the persons, events, and ideas—in effect, the building blocks—to begin a wider interpretation of the evolution of social Catholicism. In doing so, he amply covers France, Italy, and Ireland, but, surprisingly, neglects Germany. It struck me that Bishop von Ketteler, especially, deserved more than three pages. Almost nothing is said about Heinrich Pesch and solidarism.

As a sociologist, I was also frustrated when Bokenkotter seemed surprised that social Catholicism did not thrive in Sicily. He comes close to suggesting that all that was needed was a bevy of Luigi Sturzos with their social zeal. Any reader of Robert Putnam's *Democracy in Italy* (Princeton University Press, 1993) would know that the kind of civil society which breeds democracy and voluntarist social organizations was systematically squelched in the Italian South. No number of bright ideas or amount of saintly virtue could finesse the structural realities of such a top-down society.

In many ways, Bokenkotter seems to have written of people he esteems as heroes and heroines. He includes chapters on Michael Collins and Eamon de Valera (an unusual choice, but illuminating); Adenauer (a fascinating political figure, but surely no great shakes as a social Catholic); Dorothy Day, Oscar Romero, and Lech Walesa. That the Walesa chapter does not mention the debates among more foundational social thinkers, such as Josef Tischner and Adam Michnik, rather astounded me.

In this long (yet sprightly written) book, there is no summing up, no clear social analysis, little in the way of an interpretive map. Yet no other book presents, in such an accessible form, the essential biographical and philosophical thought of so many of the key figures in nonofficial social Catholicism. In sum, a rather idiosyncratic book, but one that should prove very useful to those who can place the lives and ideas discussed into a broader framework of social forces, constraints, and possibilities.

The Von Hügel Institute memorandum also issues a call for a more careful comparison of Catholic social thought with "secular" social philosophy. Denis Janz, a historian at Loyola University in New Orleans, in a retrospective study of the encounter of Christianity with Marxism, takes us a long way toward achieving a key part of this task.

*World Christianity and Marxism* stems from Janz's twelve years of participation in the annual "Future of Religion Seminar" in Dubrovnik, which brought together revisionist Marxists and critical Christian thinkers. Janz's thesis is provocative, but thoroughly persuades me. Behind the loud Christian "no" to Marx, Janz contends, social Catholicism snuck in an important, if muted, "yes."

Long ago, the Protestant theologian

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Adolph Harnack contended that Christianity, over and over, defeated its most dangerous foes by absorbing and then transmuting the enemy's essential features. Janz mounts careful case studies of the Christian-Marxist encounter in places such as Cuba, Nicaragua, Poland, and China. In this nuanced, learned, and yet accessible study, Janz comes to the conclusion that, on balance, world Christianity has benefited from its encounter with Marxism. In Cuba the church is now poised to benefit from a kind of credibility and renewal that eluded it in the pre-Castro era. Thoughtful Christians have often, even if by subterfuge, internalized key elements of the Marxist critique of religion. As Janz concludes: "Ultimately, though they were often reluctant students, Christians learned something *about themselves* from Karl Marx." □

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# THE JURY IS OUT

**The Death Penalty in America**
**Current Controversies**
*Edited by Hugo Adam Bedau*
*Oxford University Press, $35, 524 pp.*

**The Death Penalty**
**An Historical and Theological Survey**
***James J. Megivern***
*Paulist Press, $29.95, 641 pp.*

**Edward McGlynn Gaffney, Jr.**

Just as popular support for the death penalty in America reaches an all-time high, both in raw numbers and in intensity of feeling, two new books on the subject challenge the consensus. Both are written by critics of the penalty who are also both academic philosophers, and who do not disguise their views. As Hugo Bedau writes in the foreword to the Megivern volume, this "is history with an attitude, scholarship in service of an argument." There is passion in Bedau's own volume as well, but a greater sense of balance in the presentation of the modern debate about the penalty. Both volumes contain comprehensive bibliographies.

As the subtitle of Megivern's book suggests, he explores the role of religion in the history of the penalty. The principal question Megivern sets out to resolve is how the Christian community not merely tolerated but actively defended—until fairly recently—the intentional infliction of death as a right of the state and a desirable and necessary institution. The most curious aspect of the Megivern volume is his editorial judgment of what to say and what to leave out of his historical narrative. He spends too much time on byways and not enough time on the highways of his subject. For example, he begins logically enough with a prologue on biblical material. He casts serious doubt that provisions for death in the "law codes" in the Torah were ever regularly or systematically enforced. And he notes that by the first century of the common era, the rabbis had virtually eliminated the death penalty by escalating the procedural requirements before the penalty could be imposed. A Jewish court that imposed the penalty more than once in a century was known as a "bloody sanhedrin." But he dwells briefly on only two texts: "If anyone sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed" (Gen. 9:6), and "the one in authority...does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer" (Rom. 13:3-4). Megivern succeeds in demonstrating that neither is a proof text requiring the administration of the death penalty, but his treatment of the biblical materials is too skimpy to be very helpful. He acknowledges that "more needs to be said" about the teaching of Jesus on deliberate killing, but deals with it only fleetingly hundreds of pages later. He also states that "the story of the capital execution of Jesus is central to the message of the Christian gospel," but offers no exegesis of the Passion narratives or any sound biblical theology of this fundamental theme.

Bedau fills this gap by including a sample from the debate on the death penalty by a Baptist theologian, Wayne House, and the late Mennonite theologian, John Howard Yoder. Megivern shows that it was a desire for theological certitude—or, more specifically, the itch to extirpate heresy—that led to the church's support of the death penalty in the fourth century. In the unfortunate metaphor of Aquinas, the heretic was like an infected limb, needing to be cut off to save the health of the body. With the church's blessing on the state's elimination of theological error came a muting of the church's voice when the state

*"Oh, sure—now I'm completely exonerated!"*



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imposed the death penalty on a host of crimes, many of which would now be regarded as petty offenses.

Megivern's "chief interest is to trace the remarkable change in attitude toward the death penalty among the contemporary leaders of the American Catholic church." The book abounds in snippets from statements on the death penalty issued by individual bishops and by state episcopal conferences. Megivern also refers frequently to Cardinal Joseph Bernardin's effort to link the issues of abortion, euthanasia, death penalty, and war in a "consistent ethic of life." Curiously, however, the profound shift in official church teaching on the death penalty represented in Pope John Paul II's 1995 encyclical, *Evangelium vitae*, is confined to less than two pages in this very large tome. Without citing this encyclical on the point, Megivern concludes that a trio of values—the sanctity of human life, the right to life, and the equal dignity of all persons—now requires that "from a Christian perspective, the death penalty has nothing to be said for it, and everything to be said against it."

Of the two volumes, Bedau's is far more valuable. He makes clear his own unalterable opposition to the death penalty in deft introductions to each section of the book and in four of his own essays. Thanks to his skillful editing of primary sources, Bedau succeeds in being fair not to both, but to all, sides of this many-faceted controversy. Good answers to hard questions about capital punishment abound.

Anyone who wishes to be an informed participant in this debate must become familiar with the arguments in Bedau's superlative anthology. The readings in this collection shatter the illusion that anything about the death penalty—its purpose, its effect, its cost, its method—is as simple as its advocates on and off courts would have the public believe. In *Furman* v. *Georgia* (1972), the case that found the penalty as then administered unconstitutional, Justice Thurgood Marshall wrote that popular support for the penalty was based on ignorance about several facts: that the death penalty does not deter homicide more than long terms of imprisonment, that its operation is inhumane, that its administration is discriminatory, that convicted murderers are rarely executed, and that they pose little future threat to society. If these facts were well known, Marshall thought, "the great mass of citizens ... would conclude that the death penalty is immoral and therefore unconstitutional."

Marshall's hypothesis expresses deep trust in democracy: knowledge persuades the people, and the people change policies known to be immoral. Since the death penalty continues unabated, Marshall's hypothesis appears to be invalid. Or is it? One of the essays in the Bedau volume shows how "little is known about what the American public really thinks of capital punishment." As long as pollsters only ask for a "Yes" or "No" reply to the question "Do you favor the death penalty?" a strong majority indicates support. But this support may be a mile wide and an inch deep. For example, both polling data and jury behavior show that Americans differentiate among


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kinds of killings, with much greater willingness to apply the ultimate sanction to a serial murderer, say, than to a battered wife who reaches in desperation for a knife to kill an abusive husband. And a 1991 Gallup Poll showed a marked falloff in support for the death penalty if the public is told of a more effective and far less costly alternative, life without parole. Another study by William Bowers cited in the Bedau volume shows that support for the death penalty plummets still further when a requirement is added that a murderer work in prison industries for money that would go to the families of their victims.

Politicians who prey on our fear of violence should not try to fool most of us most of the time with tough talk on the death penalty. Killing killers will not give us the security from violence we all seek. □

**Edward McGlynn Gaffney, Jr.,** *is professor of law at Valparaiso University School of Law in Valparaiso, Indiana.*

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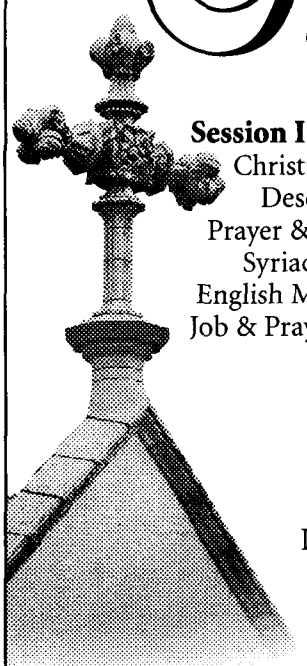

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## CORRESPONDENCE

*(Continued from page 4)*

ing to the church almost four years ago. Confession was the first piece, and I felt as if I needed a computer disk to bring with me that scary Saturday morning. It has taken some hard work, but with the help of some wonderful priests, I have a completely different perspective on confession now.

After some three years of going every two or three months, a priest I respect insisted that one needed to go once a month, so I gave it a try. What great advice. Far from creating or encouraging guilt, confession frees us from it. Regular reception of the sacrament develops a mindfulness that leads to inner peace. It forces a focus on sinfulness as opposed to a list of sins. It seems to me that coming to a better understanding of one's shadow side, knowing one's Achilles' heel, trying to work to improve it but knowing one is forgiven, is pretty healing and very powerful.

I don't know why my experience is different. I've never had a three-minute penance. Once I was told to make a list of twenty-five things I was grateful for, and they had to be significant. I still have the list.

I need to be comfortable with the priest, so I make an effort to get to know him. The obvious added benefit is that he knows me. I need to sit down with the priest one-on-one and not be rushed, so I make an appointment. Since I work full-time, have a family, volunteer, etc., it isn't as if I'm twiddling my thumbs, looking for things to do at church. But, having been gone for more than twenty years and having found such peace in my faith again, I want to make sure I don't stray.

Reconciliation was something that bothered me a lot. But, I have talked to a number of priests about what bothered me and understand this sacrament much differently now. It is truly a very healing process and an important part of my life. I am grateful that those who taught me the second go-around and helped me get to this place. I see that as Catholics we are re-



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ally incredibly fortunate to have this available to us. If this letter prompts even one person to make the sacrament meaningful for them, I will be happy to have written it.

HELEN AKINC
*Winston-Salem, N.C.*

## Enlightenment & exultation

My ability to read is becoming more and more difficult. Let me just say I've loved *Commonweal* for many, many years and find it very hard not having my husband to exult over the articles with. Thank you for many hours of happiness and enlightenment.

It was wonderful to have dear John Dunne—your media critic's "favorite living theologian"— referred to in a review of Harold Bloom's *Shakespeare* ["The Source of Our Selves," November 6, 1998]. I am passing the piece on to a grandson who just performed in *King Lear* off-Broadway.

MARY FITZGERALD
*Albuquerque, N.M.*

## Web matters

Has thought been given to permitting *Commonweal* subscribers online access to entire issues of the magazine? Being able to download articles on particular matters into personal archives is certainly preferable for me to (heaven forbid) taking an Exacto knife to my favorite magazine.

DICK BRUMMEL
*Kansas City, Mo.*

## On the index

When I got my December 18 issue I was annoyed to see the index for the year. What a waste of paper in a time of electronic media. I found earlier indexes on your website, but where are 1997 and 1998?

RICHARD KUEBBING
*Smyrna, Calif.*

## The editors reply:

*To Mr. Brummel:* Thought has been given. But the economics of whole issues online doesn't work—at least, not yet, not for us. Stay tuned.

*To Mr. Kuebbing:* It is not a waste of paper for readers who like to peruse the index while, say, riding a bus or taking a bath. The 1997 and 1998 indexes will shortly appear on our website; in the meantime, keep the paper copy handy!

## Gay unions & marriage

Re: the dialogue between Dignity's Robert Miailovich and writer Dennis O'Brien [Correspondence, November 6, 1998], may I suggest that just as religious orders and communities are called "families," populated by "brothers" and "sisters" and led by "fathers general" and "mothers general," could we not identify committed gay sexual unions as marriage by analogy?

When Paul analogized the union of Christ and his church to the union of two persons in marriage, both the church and marriage were enhanced in our understanding. Perhaps analogizing gay unions with marriage will elevate our insights into both.

FRANK C. ARRICALE
*Bayside, Queens, N.Y.*


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# THE CHURCH EVERYONE LEAVES

*Roy Darcus*

Recently the Vatican has insisted that Anglican ordination is invalid. Those of us ordained in the Anglican and Episcopal churches are not true priests in the Catholic sense. The judgment against Anglican orders is not new, of course. But anytime someone brings up an old contention about "just what we are or are not," we can't help engaging in some reflection. Especially when the contention says we are rejects.

Being Anglican, however, has a lot to do with being rejected. The real thing about being Anglican is that we are the church that everyone leaves. We never get to reject anyone. They have always left us long before we could think of rejecting them. Look at the recent exercises in excommunication. When lately have Anglicans had a chance to practice such a heady measure of spiritual superiority? The Lutherans spurned Leibniz. The Greek Orthodox expelled Kazantzakis. The Catholic church has excommunicated any number of noble souls. But the Anglican church is the church that everyone leaves. On the Protestant side they leave because we do not have the pure gospel. We have kept it mixed, they say, with human institutions. On the Catholic side we are left because we are not the true church. We are befuddled, they say, when it comes to explaining authority. As a result, we have given countless people to different forms of Christianity. Cardinal Newman, of course, was one of the most illustrious to reject us. And we are pleased that he did much to humanize the Roman church.

Now it's not hard to find nasty things to say about the Anglicans. We have provided rich material for derision over the centuries: our worldliness, our smugness, our predilection for privilege. But perhaps the nastiest thing they say about us is that our church is just a historical accident. Henry VIII and all that. By contrast, other self-respecting churches claim to be connected with a consistent source of truth which cannot be bent out of shape by historical contingency or human imperfection.

But maybe being a historical accident isn't all that bad. Especially if there is no privileged refuge from the flux and contingency of time and space. We are all historical accidents. But we wrap ourselves in the magnificent robes of a pretended eternity. None of us wants to think of ourselves as a contingency. But need we be so ashamed?

The story of the Incarnation tells us that God in Christ submitted to the world's contingencies, as one who would live through them rather than as one who would smile at their ineffectiveness over him. Jesus as the Christ is the point of reference for contingency, not its cancellation. In other words, God chose to know what it was like to be a historical accident. Redemption therefore will always be an accident. The classical language refers to grace. It is encountered in the very texture of the swirling continuum. Don't you see? The very lack of a guarantee, the very gracefulness of grace, means we can always look for the Spirit.

Having accepted that we have no guarantees and that we cannot claim a privileged position over against history, Anglicans have come to accept that church office can take on many historical forms. What is "valid" about those forms is their acceptability to the community of faith which adopts them and measures them against the gospel. Some of those forms might, to an Anglican, be founded on lamentable theological ideas, but those ideas do not invalidate the constitution of the ministerial office.

None of us, of course, can say what God is or is not doing. But the picture of God sitting somewhere ready to throw the "invalid" or "valid" switch I suspect tells us more of a human mentality of the nineteenth century (God as the great switchman of the sky?) than it does of the mind of God for all time.

The most heartrending pain of division between Anglican and Catholic comes from the very closeness of Anglican sensibility to most Roman Catholic ethical practice. We are both suspicious of the artificial, the technological gimmick. We both want to be responsible to our human constitution as it finds its truth in its own physical goodness. But we differ as well. It shows up perhaps in the "hard cases." It is my impression that Catholic moral theology seeks to have some principle to apply to every contingency. Anglicans would say there are dark places wherein only our faith in God can sustain us, a faith that finds every principle and idea insufficient. Then we must act according to who and what we are and ask God to forgive us.

Anglicans have enjoyed many good things from history. Perhaps that is why we have been able to tolerate such rejection from those who seek more pure forms of Christianity. We have an annoying sense of superiority, of *noblesse oblige*. We recognize that the disadvantaged need the satisfaction of damning us to hell. But as an Anglican I try to face the fact that all such attitudes, whether of superiority or inferiority, are purely contingent upon a set of historical accidents. And I am willing to show you mine if you are willing to show me yours. But that, of course, the Vatican can never do. □

**Roy Darcus** *is an Anglican priest with the Diocese of Calgary.*



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